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DANTE AND BAUDELAIRE: TWO VISIONS OF HELL

by



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ABSTRACT

This comparative study of Dante's Inferno and Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal examines the affinities and disparities between the two poems. Beginning with a selective survey of comparisons between Dante and Baudelaire the thesis then looks at Dante's reputation in France from about 1810 to 1860, Baudelaire's knowledge and use of Dante and the possibility of Dante's influence on the French poet.

Limiting itself to the visions of hell which the two poets present, the paper deals primarily, but not exclusively, with the color and light-dark imagery and tries to show their stylistic and thematic function in the two poems. The thesis attempts to arrive at some perceptions of the moral problems with which the two poets are concerned and of the different sensibilities which their respective solutions represent. The premise behind such a study is that a greater appreciation and new and better insights into the works of both poets can be had when these works are examined together.

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J.P.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many people who have read Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal and Dante's Inferno have been struck by the similarities which they have found between the two poems. T.S. Eliot observed though, that "It is true that many people who enjoy Dante enjoy Baudelaire; but the differences are as important as the similarities. Baudelaire's inferno is very different in quality and significance from that of Dante."¹ This impression of déjà vu and at the same time of contrast which a reading of the two poems produces is one of the five starting points that can form the basis for a comparative study of Dante and Baudelaire. A second approach is that many critics, in discussing Baudelaire, have made references to Dante. Some of their remarks have been merely casual comparisons between the two poets, but other observations and studies have been of a serious nature.²

¹"Baudelaire," in Selected Essays 1917-1932 (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1932), p. 368.

²James S. Patty, "Baudelaire's Knowledge and Use of Dante," Studies in Philology LIII, (1956), pp. 599-611, is one of the most important of these studies.

The persistence with which Dante-Baudelaire comparisons have appeared over the past hundred years warrants that the question of the association between the two poets be investigated. The third basis for a study is that Baudelaire was familiar with Dante's work as is evident from the references to the Italian poet in his prose writings. This fact, when considered with the observations of affinities found in the poetry of the two authors, raises the dual question: to what extent did Baudelaire use Dante's work as a source for his own poetry and, can we determine Dante's influence, if any, on the work of Baudelaire? A fourth approach is suggested by the same general Christian-humanist tradition that both the French and the Italian poet share. Many readers see Baudelaire as a significant Catholic poet.³ Like Dante, Baudelaire deals with traditional moral problems: good and evil, sin and punishment, love, earthly pleasure and spiritual perfection. Both poets write about human suffering on several levels: spiritual and physical, personal and universal. Each poet presents us with his vision of hell. A final possible area of study is that the two poets, although five hundred years apart, freely borrow from a similar classical Greco-Roman tradition. Dante's use of ancient mythology is well known. And many critics have argued

³Paul Gagnon, "Le 'Catholicisme' de Baudelaire," Revue de L'Université Sherbrooke, IV, 3 (Feb. 1964), pp. 153-60.

for the classical qualities in both the content and style of Baudelaire's work.⁴

This thesis will deal with the first four areas of discussion. In a selective survey of some of the comparisons between Dante and Baudelaire we will assess the contribution made by these studies to the problem of distinguishing between the concept of affinities and influence in the discipline of Comparative Literature. Then we shall briefly consider the possibility of making the investigation of Baudelaire's knowledge and use of Dante an influence study.

The primary, though not exclusive, interest of this study is an examination of verbal parallels, especially light imagery, between the Inferno and Les Fleurs du Mal. The premise behind this pursuit is the belief that verbal parallels can reflect deeper rappports intérieurs. Implicit in this study is the notion that style is inextricably bound to the content of poetry and thus we shall look at the stylistic and thematic function of the imagery of light and darkness in the two poems. This will hopefully lead to some significant perceptions of the moral problems with which Dante and Baudelaire deal and of the different sens-

⁴Henri Peyre, "Baudelaire, Romantic and Classical," in Baudelaire: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Henri Peyre (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962).

ibilities which their respective solutions represent.

As a possible way of approaching the moral problems with which the two poets are concerned we shall look at two visions⁵ of hell, that of Dante and that of Baudelaire. Not only to make it more convenient for our examination but also because we can make this natural division, I have broken the discussion of the pictures of hell into two parts: the two personal hells of Dante and Baudelaire and the expanded view of hell on the wider plane of society, that is the experience of hell which the two poets share with others. Since we are examining the light-dark imagery, a visual phenomenon, we shall limit our study to only the visions of hell. The fact that Dante's Inferno is a narrative of a journey through all of hell while Baudelaire's poem gives us only scenes from hell, inferno-like experiences and numerous references to "l'enfer," "les démons," and "les monstres," does not prevent us from comparing the two imaginative pictures of hell that are impressed upon us.

It is the ultimate hope that a comparative study of this nature will help the reader not only to see the two poems

⁵The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, eds. H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler (London: Oxford university Press. 1964) defines vision as "supernatural or prophetic apparition; thing seen in the imagination; imaginative insight."

in a new perspective but also to enjoy them to a greater degree.

CHAPTER II

A SELECTIVE SURVEY OF DANTE AND BAUDELAIRE

COMPARISONS 1859-1970

It is fitting that one of the earliest references to a similarity between Dante and Baudelaire should be a poetic one. In 1859 Henri Cantel published "Le mal et le beau," a poem dedicated to Charles Baudelaire which begins:

J'ai respiré tes Fleurs du Mal, ces roses pales,
Emeraudes d'amour, douloureuse opales,
Que tailla ta main vive avec un art nouveau.

and contains the simile:

Guidé par le Seigneur ou par le Mauvais Ange,
Tu descends, comme Dante, une spirale étrange,¹
Mais tu marches sans peur dans cette obscurité.

We can see that the verses are intended more as an adulation for Baudelaire than as a serious comparison to Dante. And when Barbey d'Aurevilly writes that Cantel is numbered among Baudelaire's disciples we can understand the reason for this praise of the French poet.²

¹Impressions et visions, Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1859, pp. 240-242. Quoted in W.T. Bandy and Claude Pichois, ed., Baudelaire devant ses contemporains (Monaco: Editions Du Rocher, 1957), p. 200.

²Ibid.

Several years later Jules Vallès makes two comparisons between Dante and Baudelaire. Using words that are to be repeated again many times Vallès calls Baudelaire, "ce classique qui... n'était... qu'un Boileau hystérique, et s'en allait jouer le Dante par les cafés." To this rather ambiguous flattery Vallès later adds, "Non qu'il posât pour la brutalité; il jouait, au contraire, les précieux infâmes, il avait voulu moderniser l'infernalisme du Dante et scudériser l'ardure."³

Both Cantel and Vallès are near the beginning of a long line of authors who have compared Baudelaire to Dante since Les Fleurs du Mal were first published in 1857.⁴ Most have made only passing or general comments. Often the association between Dante and Baudelaire, especially among French critics, has been made as a kind of hyperbole of praise for Baudelaire, the implication being that in him French literature has its own Dante. Thus provocative yet superficial comparisons between the two poets are quite common: Joséphin Péladan wrote in 1891, "Baudelaire est le terrible confesseur des âmes damnées; c'est l'aumônier du désespoir; c'est un Dante au

³"Charles Baudelaire," La Situation (5 septembre 1867), in Bandy and Pichois, pp. 318-320.

⁴The article by James S. Patty, "Baudelaire's Knowledge and Use of Dante," Studies in Philology, LIII(1956), pp. 599-611 refers to eighteen critics but names only fourteen. My own investigation has uncovered twenty seven others. See the appendix for the list.

mauvais lieu."⁵ And in 1917 Ernest Raynaud declared, "Baudelaire vient de la Bible en passant par le Dante."⁶ Péladan does not elaborate on his allusion to Dante nor does Raynaud explain his implication that the Bible and Dante influenced the thought and work of Baudelaire.

Rhetorical flourishes such as these are not limited to French authors alone. In an essay with the eye-catching title, "Baudelaire: Ironic Dante," Benjamin de Casseres makes many thought-provoking yet shallow comparisons between the two poets:

Dante visited hell. Baudelaire was born in hell. Dante's hell was in hell: Baudelaire's hell was in Baudelaire. Dante brought to hell an orison. Baudelaire brought to hell another hell. In hell Dante was an outsider; a spectator, a sightseer. Baudelaire was a native to the place.⁷

It would have been more interesting from a scholarly point of view if some of these critics had developed in more specific detail their analogies between Dante and Baudelaire. Even T.S. Eliot who, in a 1928 review of Arthur Symons' translation of Baudelaire's poetry, makes some very astute observations nevertheless does not venture beyond the brief common comparison between Dante and

⁵"Critique Littéraire," La Plume (February 15, 1891) in A.E. Carter, Baudelaire et la critique française 1868-1917 (Columbia: University of North Carolina Press, 1963) p. 112.

⁶"Baudelaire et Théophile Gautier," Mercure de France (October 16, 1917) in Carter, p. 264.

⁷Forty Immortals (New York: Joseph Lawren, 1926), p. 206.

Baudelaire:

No man was ever less the dupe of passions than Baudelaire; he was engaged in an attempt to explain, to justify, to make something of them, an enterprise which puts him almost on a level with the author of the Vita Nuova.

.

The important fact about Baudelaire is that he was essentially a Christian, born out of his due time, and a classicist, born out of his due time. In his verse technique, he is nearer to Racine than to Mr. Symons; in his sensibility, he is near to Dante and not without sympathy with Tertullian.⁸

Eliot is reiterating some older views of Baudelaire as the Christian and the Classicist. But what is more interesting is that in making his comparison to Dante Eliot is maintaining that Baudelaire is basically a rationalist, and a poet with a very conscious style. This is a view that goes against those critics who see the French poet as a kind of mystic writing in a state of spiritual agony or extasy or under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Eliot, therefore, does not see a conscious literary style as irreconcilable with the artistic expression of the subconscious. Along the same lines Lionel Trilling, arguing against some of the contentions of Edmund Wilson's The Wound and the Bow, maintains "that the more a writer takes pains with his work and the further he removes it from the

⁸"Baudelaire in Our Time," in For Lancelot Andrewes (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Co. Ltd., 1929), pp. 95 and 103 respectively. Cf. Eliot, "Baudelaire" in Selected Essays 1917-1932 (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1932), pp. 367-378.

personal and the subjective, the more—and not the less—he is expressing his unconscious."⁹ Eliots' remarks contain, as do those of some earlier critics, the seeds for books on the Dante-Baudelaire problem but they do not go beyond this seminal level.

Thus far we have briefly looked at some of the early comparisons between Dante and Baudelaire. We shall now examine, chronologically, the recent works of some critics, and we shall judge the value of their contributions to the study of Baudelaire's relation to Dante.

In their critical edition of Les Fleurs du Mal Jacques Crépet and George Blin refer to the Dante-Baudelaire relation in several places.¹⁰ In their notes to the poems Crépet and Blin seem to take it for granted that Baudelaire knew and borrowed from Dante. In discussing the titles that Baudelaire used for his collection of poems Crépet and Blin note that one of the possibilities for the origin of the title Les Limbes is Dante's Inferno. They quote from Albert Thibaudet's Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours for an opinion as to why Baudelaire thought of using the title:

⁹"A Note on Art and Neurosis," Partisan Review XII (1945), p. 45. An example of the view of the artist as a sick man is Dr. René La forge's L'échec de Baudelaire: essai psychanalytique sur la névrose de Charles Baudelaire (Paris: Denoël et Steele, 1931).

¹⁰Charles Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du Mal (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1942).

Baudelaire avait besoin d'un lieu intermédiaire particulier, original, où se loger entre Dieu et le diable. Le titre des Limbes marquait cette localisation géographique des poèmes de Baudelaire, permettait de mieux apercevoir l'ordre que Baudelaire a voulu établir entre eux, qui est d'ordre après les trois voyages dantesques de l'Enfer, du Purgatoire et du Paradis.¹¹ Le poète de Florence continué dans le poète de Paris.

The last statement, as we have already seen, is one that occurs often in commentaries on Baudelaire. Although we cannot take seriously the idea that Baudelaire was in some way a kind of reincarnation of Dante, we can see to what extent some critics see affinities between the two poets. We shall deal with the title, Les Limbes later in greater detail but at this point I can say that the possibility that it came from Dante is a good one.

In their commentary on several poems Crépet and Blin cite Dante as a possible source for various lines. These two critics connect the poem "Don Juan aux Enfers" to Delacroix's painting "La Barque de Don Juan" (ca. 1840). These two works are in turn related to Delacroix's other famous barque painting, "Dante et Virgile" (ca. 1822), which shows a scene from Inferno VIII, in which Dante, Virgil and the boatman Phlegyas are crossing the River Styx.¹² The possibility of this relationship is reinforced by the fact that the poem was composed before 1843. This chain of relationships may appear far-fetched but we will see later that Delacroix's work played a very important role in Baudelaire's intellectual life.

¹¹No place given, Stock edition, 1936, p. 275.

¹²Crépet and Blin, pp. 320-321.

We should note however that the second line of "Don Juan aux Enfers" makes reference to Charon who is the boatman found on the River Acheron in Inferno III and who is not to be confused with Phlegyas. But as Crépet and Blin point out Baudelaire also alludes to the River Styx. Lines three and four of "L'Irrémediable" read:

Dans un Styx bourbeux et plombé
Où nul oeil du Ciel ne pénètre.

The two critics observe:

Il semble que Baudelaire ait vu ce Styx moins à travers l'Enéide VI que selon la Divine Comédie où le fleuve infernal est qualifié de bourbeux et l'Enfer présenté comme "un lieu où rien ne luit".¹³

From the sonnet "Le Couvercle" Crépet and Blin present us with this intriguing possibility:

L'image principale—celle du v. 13 et du titre— a pu trouver son point de départ dans un passage de Dante (L'Enfer, ch. IX, trad. de Pier-Angelo Fiorentino, celle dont Baudelaire a fait l'éloge):

Des Flammes serpentaient entre une tombe et l'autre, et les embrasaient tellement, qu'aucun métier employant le fer ne le chauffe d'avantage. Tous les couvercles étaient soulevés, et il en sortait des plaintes si amères, qu'on voyait bien que c'étaient des cris de malheureux et de torturés.¹⁴

In contrast to these observations we have the silence of the two critics on the possible sources for "La Béatrice". Never-

¹³Ibid., p. 437.

¹⁴Crépet and Blin, p. 557.

theless the commentary that Crépet and Blin do give us on Baudelaire's use of Dante constantly makes us question to what extent the two hells, that of Dante and that of Baudelaire, may be related.

In his Commentaire des "Fleurs du Mal" Robert-Benoît Chérix also seems to take it as an accepted fact that Baudelaire knew and borrowed from Dante.¹⁵ Like Crépet and Blin he too quotes an earlier critic on the matter of the Dante-Baudelaire relationship. From Alfred Poizat's Le Symbolisme: de Baudelaire à Claudel¹⁶ Chérix takes these familiar sounding words:

Les Fleurs du Mal donnent l'impression d'un temple enseveli sous les sables, dans l'âme de Baudelaire, comme une construction chrétienne, autrefois dévastée et ruinée.... Ce sont les fragments d'une Divine Comédie....¹⁷

Chérix seems to be convinced of this idea for he reiterates it twice. In discussing the confessional qualities in "Au Lecteur" this critic observes:

Dès le seuil de son Apocalypse, le poète fait signe au lecteur, son frère, l'invitant à être son compagnon de pèlerinage vers le royaume des ténèbres, et cette consigne établit, de la suggestive préface du livre, la parenté spirituelle qui unit Baudelaire à Dante Alighieri.... Les Fleurs du Mal sont, à un point de vue, la Divine Comédie de l'homme moderne.¹⁸

¹⁵Commentaire des "Fleurs du Mal": essai d'une critique intégrale (Genève: Pierre Cailler, Editeur, 1949).

¹⁶No place given, La Renaissance du Livre, 1919.

¹⁷Chérix, p. XVIII.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 11.

And in commenting on "Un Voyage à Cythère" and its relation to "Lesbos", "Les Femmes damnées", "La Béatrice", "Don Juan aux Enfers" and others, Chérix writes:

Ce cycle infernal, par sa perfection formelle et par son prodigieux relief, par sa diversité et par sa rigueur psychologique, est la Comédie dantesque de l'homme moderne.¹⁹

For Chérix this comparison to Dante is not simply a figure of speech for he refers to Dante as a source for parts of Les Fleurs du Mal several times. He sees the monsters in "Au Lecteur" as reminiscent of the beasts in Canto I of the Inferno:

Suivant les données de cette symbolisme, les sept vices capitaux doivent "a fortiori" s'incarner dans des bêtes particulièrement repoussantes. Dante, au milieu de la Forêt obscure, avait rencontré, rôdant sur une plage déserte, une panthère (la luxure) un lion (l'orgueil) et une louve (la rapacité). Baudelaire évoque les monstres d'une ménagerie infâme, qui est le sommaire des défections humaines.²⁰

Not all of Chérix's observations have this perception into the relationships of images. In commenting on "Don Juan aux Enfers" Chérix says of Baudelaire:

A l'antiquité mythologique il prend Charon, le passeur des ombres; à Dante, les anses du Styx, où "un grand troupeau de victimes offertes" suffoquent dans les eaux maudites.²¹

That Baudelaire borrowed and mixed the images for his poems, as

¹⁹Ibid., p. 423.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 12-13.

²¹Ibid., p. 80.

Chérix suggests, is understandable, but Chérix incorrectly gives the source for the River Styx as Canto V rather than Canto VIII and does not seem to realize that Charon is found in Cantos III and IV. Despite such errors we can agree with Chérix when he calls this poem, "une des fresques les plus puissantes de de l'Infernale Comédie bâtie par Baudelaire...."²²

Chérix seems to feel quite justified in hearing many other echoes from Dante in Baudelaire's poetry:

Duellum, comme Don Juan, comme les Femmes damnées ou la Béatrice, accuse, par la rigueur de la théologie et par l'intensité du drame qui l'habille, la parenté de Charles Baudelaire avec le grand Florentin.²³

Dante's Commedia is regarded by Chérix as a source for the female apparition in "Hymne," the pit and reptiles in "L'Irrémédiable," the darkness of "Le jeu," the demons in "Femmes damnées," the lady in "La Béatrice" and the angel in "Le Voyage."²⁴

Does Chérix go too far in seeing references to Dante in Les Fleurs du Mal? It can be argued that many of the references that Chérix feels come from Dante are quite common in literature and are probably taken from classical mythology. Whatever we may think of Chérix's over-zealousness and whether we agree with his interpretations

²²Ibid., p. 80.

²³Ibid., p. 142.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 157, 305-306, 349, 404, 419, and 457 respectively.

or not we can accept that some of his observations are nevertheless helpful in seeing the affinities between the works of Dante and of Baudelaire.

In his book, L'Originalité de Baudelaire, Robert Vivier devotes three short paragraphs to Baudelaire's possible debt to Dante:

Pour retrouver parmi les oeuvres marquants en circulation à l'époque de Baudelaire une construction aux assises aussi profondes et aussi essentielles que celles des Fleurs du Mal, une construction fondée sur le rythme même d'une destinée humaine en même temps que sur une conception du monde, il faut remonter au delà même de toutes les oeuvres classiques (dont l'ordonnance est souvent extérieure et la subdivision chronologique), jusqu'à la Divine Comédie.

Dante a joui, à l'époque romantique, d'un renouveau de prestige. Il est naturel que Baudelaire, que liait d'ailleurs à Dante une certaine parenté d'esprit et de tempérament, ait partagé le sentiment de ses contemporains. D'autre part, ses dispositions personnelles et la visée philosophique de sa création le préparaient à apprécier dans la Divine Comédie cet élément architectural dont l'importance échappait à la turbulence esthétique de l'époque, et à ambitionner de l'égaliser.

Aussi peut-on supposer que Baudelaire a été soutenu, dans la réalisation de sa construction poétique, par le grand et lointain exemple du poète florentin.²⁵

This is the extent of Vivier's speculation on the problem: Dante was popular during the Romantic period and the two poets have similarities of "esprit" and "tempérament." Vivier falls short of expectation, for not only has he ignored the statements of French critics on the Dante-Baudelaire problem but he has also not taken the trouble to seriously examine it for himself. In a footnote Vivier

²⁵(Bruxelles, 1965), pp. 121-122. [The last revised edition was in 1952].

does acknowledge the work of G. de Reynold on the possibility of a comparison between Les Fleurs Du Mal and La Divina Commedia but he dismisses it as "un peu sollicité."²⁶ In such a study of Baudelaire's originality and especially since Vivier refers to the problem and raises our expectations I feel that it was the author's responsibility to investigate, in a more scholarly way, Baudelaire's debt to Dante.

In 1953 Jean Prévost in his work, Baudelaire: essai sur la création et l'inspiration poétique, timidly broaches the Dante-Baudelaire comparison several times. The most interesting of these is in Prévost's discussion of Delacroix's influence on Baudelaire. Of the eighth quatrain of "Les Phares," that which is dedicated to Delacroix, Prévost says: "Le premier vers évoque Dante et Virgile aux Enfers—et aussi le rouge, couleur énergique chez Delacroix."²⁷ The first line of the quatrain which reads, "Delacroix, lac de sang hanté de mauvais anges" and the lines in the rest of the poem do remind us of Delacroix's painting "Dante et Virgile aux Enfers," also called "La Barque de Dante." The painting depicts a scene from Inferno VIII, in which Dante and Virgil are being ferried across the River Styx by Phlegyas. Like Crépet and Blin, Prévost connects this painting to Delacroix's other painting "La Barque de Don Juan," and in turn to Baudelaire's "Don Juan aux Enfers." Defending Baudelaire's placing of Don Juan in hell with Charon, Prévost says:

Mais Baudelaire a suivi là l'exemple de Dante, de Michel-

²⁶Ibid., p. 122.

²⁷(Paris: Mercure de France, 1953), p. 111.

Ange qui a mis le Styx, la barque et Charon comme un vestibule à l'Enfer, au bas de son Jugement dernier. Baudelaire savait que Delacroix s'en était souvenu en composant la Barque de Dante....²⁸

But Prévost here has made an error for while Charon is mentioned in "Don Juan aux Enfers" the River Styx is not. As I have already indicated Charon is boatman on the River Acheron which is a vestibule of Hell. The River Styx appears in "Sed non satiata" and in "L'Irrémédiable." Thus Baudelaire was probably more familiar with the Commedia and with Delacroix's paintings than Prévost for he does not place Charon on the River Styx as this critic implies.

Prévost's study of Delacroix's influence on Baudelaire is helpful to our examination for, by showing the relation between the paintings and Baudelaire's poetry, it also aids our understanding of Dante's role in the writing of Les Fleurs du Mal.

In a short study on the themes and framework of Les Fleurs du Mal Martin Turnell makes a passing comparison between the structure of Baudelaire's poem and that of Dante.²⁹ But other than this shy suggestion Turnell makes no acknowledgement to any study done on this problem either by himself or by others. A year later in his book, Baudelaire: A Study of his poetry, Turnell comes back to this comparison twice but again only with passing references.³⁰

²⁸Ibid., p. 112

²⁹"The Religion of Baudelaire," Renascence, V, 2 (Spring, 1953), pp. 99-103.

³⁰(New York: New Directions Books, 1954), pp. 88 and 230.

Two years later in 1956 Lloyd James Austin in his much quoted book on Baudelaire³¹ goes into a short discussion on the ancestry of "la doctrine des correspondances" and its relation to symbolism from Hellenic Noe-Platonism, to St. Paul, St. Bonaventura, Dante, the Renaissance, Swedenborg, Creuzer, Hegel and Baudelaire.³² Austin thus suggests an indirect relationship between Dante and Baudelaire since he sees the French poet as an heir to this Neo-Platonic tradition.

Later in his book in discussing the poem "Les Phares" Austin sees a parallel between the forest image in this poem and a similar image in Dante's Commedia:

Mais à travers ces images visuelles, c'est bien le son qui porte le mouvement, qui assure l'unité, et qui amène le point culminant, cet "appel des chasseurs perdus" qui retentit dans une forêt immense, comme la "selva oscura" de Dante, comme la forêt symbolique du sonnet des "Correspondances".³³

Although Austin's is a very fascinating observation it is unfortunate that he does not go beyond this suggestion of an echo from the Divina Commedia. One would expect that Austin, who seems to have a thorough knowledge of Baudelaire's work and a wide acquaintance with Baudelaire criticism, would say more on this problem in his book, at least in a footnote, but he does not.

In an article written five years later Austin returns again

³¹L'univers poétique de Baudelaire: symbolisme et symbolique (Paris: Mercure de France, 1956).

³²Ibid., pp. 63-67.

³³Ibid., p. 256.

to the Dante-Baudelaire problem.³⁴ In discussing "Le Voyage" Austin refers to Dante as the ultimate source for the last two quatrains of this poem. But again this brief note is given only in passing.

The most helpful study of the Dante-Baudelaire relationship is James S. Patty's "Baudelaire's Knowledge and Use of Dante."³⁵ In a rather extreme reaction to much of the criticism of vague generalizations and passing references Patty looks for only cold facts:

When the critics have finished making their rapprochements and their comparisons and contrasts, it yet remains to discover the hard core of the Dante-Baudelaire relationship.

.

As will be seen, the facts are much less interesting than the sonorous generalities of critics.... I believe that this is the first attempt to assemble in one place the factual details.... Examining the body of Baudelaire's work, we do not find many direct references to the great Florentine.³⁶

In his examination Patty finds what he considers insufficient evidence to show that Baudelaire read a great deal of Dante or knew him very well. Looking at the Delacroix section of the Salon de 1846 Patty does note Baudelaire's long quotation from Fiorentino's French prose translation of the Divina Commedia. But Patty says that he has

³⁴"Baudelaire: Poet or Prophet?" in Studies in Modern French Literature presented to P. Mansell Jones (Manchester, England: University of Manchester Press, 1961), p. 30.

³⁵Studies in Philology, LIII (1956), pp. 599-611. [We shall deal with this article in greater detail in chapter III.]

³⁶Ibid., p. 602.

found no evidence to show that Baudelaire knew Italian.

In addition to Delacroix's painting on the ceiling of la Bibliothèque du Luxembourg³⁷—the painting that Baudelaire praised in his Salon de 1846—the French poet also showed a great deal of enthusiasm for Delacroix's other Inferno painting, "Dante et Virgile aux Enfers" (also called "La Barque de Dante"). From this Patty hypothesises that Baudelaire explored Dante as a result of his admiration for Delacroix. But Patty cautions that the evidence shows that Baudelaire probably only knew the Inferno. If this is so then Baudelaire would have been following the vogue of the Romantic era which, as Friederich points out,³⁸ demonstrated the one-sided view of Dante as the poet of the grotesque and the infernal rather than of the celestial.

Patty goes on to examine and evaluate some of the verbal parallels that have been pointed out between Dante and Baudelaire. The suggestions by Crépet and Blin, Chérix and others, Patty finds generally unconvincing but nevertheless very interesting. Patty gives us a list of the parallels that he has found: the lines from "Duellum,"

Dans le ravin hanté des chats-pards et des onces

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³⁷This painting depicts a scene from limbo, Canto IV, in which Virgil presents Dante to Homer.

³⁸Dante's Fame Abroad 1350-1850 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1950), pp. 127 and 170.

Ce gouffre, c'est l'enfer, de nos amis peuplé;

the "troupeau de démons vicieux;" the travesty of the courtly tradition in "La Béatrice" and five quatrains of "Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte."

Although Patty strongly questions the extent of Baudelaire's knowledge of Dante and of the Italian poet's influence on Les Fleurs du Mal, he nevertheless concedes some possibilities:

A decent regard for logic and for historical realities obliges us to recognize the following limits to Baudelaire's knowledge and use of Dante: Baudelaire read some portions of the Divine Comedy, but probably no more than the Inferno; he seems to have known Dante only in French translation, more especially in Fiorentino's version; he quoted nearly fifty lines of this translation in the Salon de 1846; he made some half-dozen brief allusions to Dante which reveal no unusual admiration or knowledge of the Florentine poet; it is possible but by no means demonstrable that there are some relatively insignificant reminiscences of Dante in Les Fleurs du Mal; finally, and most importantly, one passage of "Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte" seems to have been markedly influenced by the fifth canto of the Inferno and indicates that Baudelaire was at times a sensitive and discerning reader of Dante—a conclusion that need not surprise any serious student of Baudelaire.³⁹

Because Patty's approach is determined by the criterion of "factual details" his findings reveal the minimum possible extent of Baudelaire's use of Dante. But we need not be limited either by Patty's findings nor by his approach. As I have tried to indicate and shall continue to do so in the rest of this chapter, there are a number of views on Dante's influence on Baudelaire.

In his short study, "Baudelaire et les Limbes" Léon Cellier

³⁹Patty, *ibid.*, pp. 610-611.

explores the meaning of the concept of limbo to the French poet.⁴⁰ By examining the opinions of other authors and passages from Les Fleurs du Mal, Cellier arrives at several possibilities. Like Thibaudet, Cellier sees Baudelaire's limbo as being similar to that of Dante, the traditional Catholic limbo, the place of the unbaptised just. The second possibility is that "Les Limbes," the second of the three titles Baudelaire used for the collection that eventually became Les Fleurs du Mal, is associated with Delacroix's painting of a limbo scene from Inferno IV. Cellier notes that Baudelaire writing about this painting quoted from a translation of the Divina Commedia. But Cellier finds that "limbes" has also other meanings: a place of darkness and despair, a synonym for hell, the domain of the modern spleen. Thus "les limbes" is an image not just of the afterlife but of the here and now:

L'incertaine vie que nous menons sur terre ne se déroule-t-elle pas également dans la nuit, entre le bien et le mal, dans un état qui participe à la fois du Ciel et de l'Enfer, dans l'attente et le désespoir?⁴¹

This interpretation improves our understanding of the Dante-Baudelaire problem to some extent but to a greater degree it gives us a suggestion about Baudelaire's vision of hell and of modern life.

Angelo Philip Bertocci in his book From Symbolism to Baudelaire examines the theories and practices of the symbol from Platinus and

⁴⁰Studi Francesi, VIII (1964), pp. 432-447.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 435.

the Neo-Platonists to Dante, Goethe and the Romantic theorists, and to Baudelaire. What L.J. Austin discussed in a few paragraphs Bertocci has expanded into a book. Bertocci looks at Baudelaire's literary ancestors, but while he implies that the French poet inherited a symbolic tradition from Dante he does not make any claims of direct influence. Devoting the better part of his study to the poetic elements and structures of Baudelaire's symbolism, Bertocci draws several parallels between Dante and Baudelaire. Let us look at one of the more interesting ones. In defining the term symbol Bertocci writes that the

"allegory" of Dante is symbol... in the sense that it conveys a higher and ultimate reality. Yet there is one sense in which Dante's practice is more like Baudelaire's than like Goethe's. For, as we shall see, a poem which Goethe calls "symbolic" need not possess what, with Baudelaire and the post-Baudelaireans, we call a symbol.... The Baudelairean symbole is presented more indirectly. In Dante such indirection is demonstrated in the narrative of the journey in another world even if that journey is meant to suggest the real conditions, and the real meaning of man's journey in this world.⁴²

Bertocci makes several other comparisons between the esoteric elements in Dante and the mysticism of Baudelaire, their use of analogy and the inner lives of the two poets—the moral conflict of good and evil.

The kind of vision that sees the virtues and the vices not as names given to modes of behaviour in the practical book keeping of the mores but as moral powers acutely distinguishable makes possible Dante's Divine Comedy. Baudelaire has that vision and, as in the case of Dante,

⁴²(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p. 13.

his "allegory" tends to become "symbol."⁴³

In comparing Dante's Beatrice with Baudelaire's "Béatrice" and Beatrice-experience Bertocci finds several differences among which are:

Dante's Beatrice stands on the other side of the refining fire through which the body must finally pass. The senses must somehow be superseded and transcended despite the anguished hesitation of Dante's pilgrim. Baudelaire's Beatrice-experience is expressed through clarity, light, music, perfume; but these images are not used to suggest something beyond. What there is of the "beyond" is contained in their fusion.

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In Baudelaire and in Novalis, but not in Dante, the spirituality, at least for an orthodox Western mysticism, has a disturbing element of sense: it is a volupté. The flesh of Baudelaire's Beatrice may be spiritual, and its perfume may be that of the angels, but it is perfume, connected with an olfactory sense traditionally held to be less spiritual than sight or hearing.

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In Baudelaire, as in Novalis, the spiritual comes closer to a sublimation of senses than its transcendence as in Dante and Plato. The Paradisial experience is sought hic et nunc.⁴⁴

Thus Baudelaire, though an heir to the Neo-Platonic tradition, nevertheless, used the courtly-love element for his own purposes of travesty.

⁴³Ibid., p. 130.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 141-143.

This technique of inversion in Baudelaire's "La Béatrice" is explored in a short paper by Mark Musa and John Porter Houston.⁴⁵ Limiting themselves only to this single Baudelairean poem and its connection to the Vita Nuova, Musa and Houston meticulously examine "La Béatrice" for any evidence of borrowings from Dante. The results at which they arrive are very convincing. They note Baudelaire's "satanic inversion" of the elements from Dante's poem: the garden becomes a wasteland, the angels become demons, the imperial objects become base, and the chaste ladies become lewd. Among many subtle verbal parallels they note that the eagle is a symbol of the poet in both poems. Baudelaire has traditionally been regarded as the father of modern poetry, the innovator of a new poetic language, but Musa and Houston also show how Baudelaire used traditional material. They conclude their paper by emphasising the French poet's debt to tradition:

It is time that Baudelaire be recognized as the archaizing poet he in many ways was. The use of old techniques is not in itself dishonouring, as some critics of modern French poetry seem to think. Indeed, it is only because of the pre-existence of a large body of religious symbolism that Baudelaire, along with Gautier, Hugo, and Nerval, was able to develop so prodigiously the demonic imagery characteristic of later French romanticism. A poem like "La Béatrice" can be read only in the light of literary tradition.⁴⁶

⁴⁵"Dante, 'La Béatrice', and Baudelaire's Archaism," Italica, XLII, 1 (March, 1965), pp. 169-74.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

The authors do not deal with the questions of Baudelaire's knowledge of Italian, nor to what extent he had read Dante, rather they limit their inquiry to a close textual comparison of the two poems. Since the study of Musa and Houston is such a limited one, it does not make any ultimate pronouncements about Dante's influence on Baudelaire but only a statement, reminiscent of T.S. Eliot, about tradition and the individual work of art.

With Guiseppe Antonio Brunelli we again return to limbo. In his Tre studi su Charles Baudelaire Brunelli has an essay on Les Limbes in which he examines the relation of this title to Dante's Commedia. Arguing that the French romantic authors were partial to the Commedia and that the social and intellectual climate was favourably disposed to the idea of limbo in literature Brunelli goes so far as to maintain that Baudelaire took the title from the Inferno by way of Delacroix's painting on the subject:

Delacroix s'è ispirato all 'episodio per affrescare la volta della biblioteca del Luxembourg, descritta allora anche dal Salon 1846 del Baudelaire, che cita, in traduzione, il famoso passo, a cui si ricollega pure la prima pagina del "recueil" che nel 1852 ruba al poeta il titolo Limbes.⁴⁷

To Brunelli the association of the poems in Les Limbes and the limbo of the Inferno is not simply a coincidence for he sees deeper thematic affinities between the two works. With regard to "Les Phares" and "Don Juan aux Enfers" he writes:

Dal limbo degli ignavi... abbiamo di nuovo intravisto

⁴⁷ (Catania: Niccolo Giammatta Editore, 1967), p. 35.

l'inferno dei dannati di Dante. L'abisso chiama l'abisso. A quella ch'è per altri una moda, una carnalità cerebrale, il Baudelaire dà il "frisson nouveau" d'un vigore spirituale, qui sottolineato nelle terzine da suoni duri accostati....⁴⁸

Brunelli feels that the echoes between the two works are a result of Baudelaire consciously returning to Dante for material and inspiration. The dramatic qualities and tragic dimensions of "La Cloche Fêlée" Brunelli sees as not only reminiscent of the Inferno and Purgatorio but he implies that Baudelaire must have returned to these works of necessity:

L'accento della poesia da delicato s'era fatto vigoroso ed ora si fa anche drammatico, serbando sempre la semplicità d'un linguaggio familiare: ed è questo che fa più alta la tragedia dell'ultima terzina e sublime il suo tono. Non è espediente retorico e d'obbligo il richiamarsi a Dante e l'accostare lo strazio umano di questa morte a quella del fuggiasco dantesco che vide "delle sue vene farsi in terra laco", o ad altri morti famosi del suo Purgatorio, ch'è, fra le sue cantiche, quella più vicina ai Limbes, come lo è agli stessi limbi danteschi: nostalgia della vita, ansia di "Cieux inconnus."⁴⁹

Despite the Italian bias indigenous to his rhetoric we can see that Brunelli's observations are helpful to a degree. While we can accept, as other critics have shown, the possibility that Baudelaire used material from Dante it is much more difficult to hold that this is a certainty as Brunelli seems to have done.

The last study at which we shall look in this chapter is the recent, stimulating paper by Glauco Cambon, "Synaesthesia in the

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 100-101.

Divine Comedy".⁵⁰ Cambon approaches the Dante-Baudelaire problem from the émetteur end of the relationship. Cambon, though, is not concerned with the question of influence, direct or indirect, but rather with the fact that one of the earliest major appearances of synaesthesia is to be found in Dante:

Since that boldest of metaphors, synaesthesia, is commonly seen as a prerogative of the experimental movements in modern poetry from German romanticism to French symbolisme and its European aftermaths, it may be hard for the historically minded reader to account for its frequent occurrence in Dante's austere poetry. There is the added difficulty that, despite his pointed use of this device in the Divine Comedy, nowhere in the prose works which preceded the epos of the Beyond does Dante seem to acknowledge synaesthesia in his otherwise elaborate theory of poetics....The important thing is to keep in mind how deliberate a craftsman he was, and to realize that, despite his careful treatment of the phenomena of visual preception (on an Aristotelian basis) in Convivio III, ix, he never comes to terms with the issue of rhetoric. Yet he considers the mutual assimilation of different senses a legitimate semantic operation....

It is precisely to Dante that we must turn to find something like a counterpart of Baudelaire's "correspondances", or of Rimbaud's "Voyelles"... or again of Mallarmé's "Les Fenêtres," "Les Fleurs," and "L'Après-midi d'un Faune." In Baudelaire's sonnet, the magical convergence of perfumes, colors and sounds mirrors a parte subiecti the aboriginal communion of all things in what was once and secretly still is after man's blighting encroachment, a living universe.... Baudelaire's synaesthesia, then, is not an incidental rhetorical usage as we might find in Virgil or Horace, but the vehicle of a privileged perception, with epistemological and metaphysical implications; and the same is true of Rimbaud's "long, raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens,"

⁵⁰Dante Studies, LXXXVIII (1970), pp. 1-16.

that experient in controlled chaos from which a purified perception of reality should arise sub specie poësis, for the bohemian seer who had read his Baudelaire or his Poe.⁵¹

To the work of L.J. Austin and A.P. Bertocci we can now add that of Cambon on the symbolic techniques of Dante and Baudelaire. As Cambon examines some of the better examples of synaesthesia in the Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso, his study becomes not only enlightening but all the more convincing.

Along with some of the better critics which we have examined in this chapter, Cambon raises several questions about the Dante-Baudelaire relationship. One question that must be asked but that can probably never be satisfactorily answered is: to what degree are the similarities that we find in the content and style of the two poets a case of coincidence and to what extent are they due to influence? Perhaps we can shed some light on this question in the next chapter.

Let me end this chapter with some remarks from Cambon that could be taken as most appropriate to this entire study:

Synaesthesia pushes his [Dante's] diction to the verge of a trans-language, beyond the logical level, and if it is rhetorically sustained by the strong Dantesque bent for ellipsis, it is also fostered by that part of Dante's faith which posited the resurrection of the flesh, thus the eventual glorification of the body and its powers—utter delight being announced to the persona as the final state of the blessed soul (Par. XIV, 52-60)....

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 1-2.

But it was finally his long patience as a genius, allied to the Platonic divine madness, that enabled him to shape his inexhaustible Kunstwerk der Zukunft, in a network of correspondances against which Baudelaire's later, groping vision must be set to obtain its right perspective.⁵²

⁵²Ibid., pp. 14-15.

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM OF DANTE'S INFLUENCE

ON BAUDELAIRE

The amount of critical attention that Baudelaire's relation to Dante has received, the comparisons of various aspects of the two poets' work, and the suggestions that Dante influenced Baudelaire make us curious about several matters. What influence did Dante have, if any, on Baudelaire's poetry? To what extent did Baudelaire use Dante as a source of material and inspiration? From what we now know about the case of Dante and Baudelaire is it possible to speak in terms of influence, that is, influence as it is understood by present day Comparative Literature scholarship? In trying to deal with these questions we shall look at four topics: Dante's reputation in France at the time of Baudelaire, Baudelaire's references to Dante in his prose, Baudelaire's use of Dante as a source of material and the theory and practice of determining influence.

Several scholars have pointed out the great popularity that Dante enjoyed in France in the first half of the nineteenth century. As early as 1903 Albert Counson in his book Dante en France notes the distinction that the Italian poet's work held in both translations and controversies.¹ More recently André Pézard in his article

¹(Paris: Fontemoing, 1906), pp. 207-211.

"Comment Dante conquiert la France aux beaux jours du romantisme (1830-1855)"² explores Dante's remarkable rise in esteem during this period:

L'âge romantique est né, chez nous, au contact d'une certaine poésie étrangère, qui, dans les meilleurs cas, était en fait la poésie classique de nos proches voisins. C'est ainsi que Dante, mal connu, mal jugé des Français au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècle, devient tout d'un coup merveilleusement populaire vers 1830. En ce premier âge, soyons franc, si l'on se vante de l'aimer, on le comprend toujours aussi mal. Trop de choses alentour sollicitent les esprits et faussent les vues. Mais ce sont les années où naissent ceux qui seront hommes faits au milieu du siècle, ils feront l'histoire dans une période capitale pour la France, et aussi pour l'Italie.³

Thus, although Dante's reputation grew at this time, he was also misunderstood. One of the French authors who first paid tribute to Dante was also one of the first to hold a distorted view of him. Pézard points out:

Il ne faut pas oublier qu'un premier manifeste d'Hugo, la préface de Cromwell...avait apporté le premier hommage de la nouvelle poésie à Dante, précurseur sublime....⁴

But when Hugo seems to think of Dante only as a poet "mêlé de grotesques et de sublime" Pézard observes:

²Studi in onore di Carlo Pellegrini (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1963), pp. 683-704.

³Ibid., p. 683.

⁴Ibid.

Il semble que Victor Hugo ignore vers 1830, ou veuille ignorer, qu'il y a chez Dante un certain Purgatoire et un certain Paradis.⁵

Hugo and the other Romantic authors seem to view Dante as the poet of the Inferno alone.

In his book Dante's Fame Abroad 1350-1850,⁶ Werner P. Friederich, examining the poet's reputation in France, clearly brings out the unbalanced view of Dante as the poet of hell. Of the Romantic period Friederich writes:

A mere glance at the increasing list of translations and imitations of Dante indicates clearly that Romanticism had now fully come to the fore.

Three translations of the Inferno during this period [1810-1830] attest to the onesided interpretation of Dante among the early romanticists as the poet of horror and revenge.⁷

Friederich presents us with a number of facts that may indicate not only Dante's popularity but also the unbalanced view of him as the poet of the gruesome. During the period from 1810 to 1830 there is only one translation of the complete Commedia, that by Artaud de Montor in 1811. Nevertheless this translation seems to be only the fourth complete one in French literature up to that time. But of the Inferno alone there are three, one each by Henri Terrason in 1817, Brait Delamathe in 1823, and J.C. Tarver in 1824. In the years that follow translations of the Commedia increase: Calemaud de Lafayette in 1835, Pier-Angelo Fiorentino in 1840

⁵Ibid., p. 684.

⁶(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950).

⁷Ibid., p. 127.

(the one to which Baudelaire refers), Auguste Brizeux in 1841, Eugène Aroux in 1842 and in 1843 Sébastien Rhéal de Cesena published the complete works of Dante in several volumes. In 1837 A. Ledreuille's translation of the Inferno appeared.

The reputation of Dante seems to be tremendous for in 1830 Lamartine declares before l'Académie française:

Dante semble le poète de notre époque, car chaque époque adopte et rajeunit tout à tour quelqu'un de ces génies immortels ... elle s'y réfléchit elle-même, elle y retrouve sa propre image.⁸

But an epoch sees itself as it wants to see itself. The Romantic authors seem to have seen their age in the Inferno alone.

Like Pézard, Friederich too cites Hugo's Préface de Cromwell as an example of the onesided view of Dante. Considered the manifesto of French Romanticism the preface emphasizes the importance of the grotesque in modern literature by referring to Dante:

Dans la pensée des modernes, au contraire, le grotesque a un rôle immense.... C'est lui, toujours lui, qui... jette dans l'enfer chrétien des hideuses figures qu'évoquera l'âpre génie de Dante.... Dante n'aurait pas tant de grâce, s'il n'avait pas de force.⁹

It is this distorted view of Dante as the poet of the Inferno, of hatred and of hideous visions, that may give us a hint about the extent and manner of Baudelaire's knowledge of him. We have already

⁸Quoted in Friederich, p. 149.

⁹Quoted in Friederich, p. 168.

seen James S. Patti argue that Baudelaire probably only knew the Inferno.¹⁰ Patti notes two references by Baudelaire that suggest such a view: once Baudelaire described Gautier as "sombre comme le Dante" and commenting on Gustave Doré undertaking to illustrate de Montor's translation of the Commedia he wrote: "Comment a-t-il pu choisir le poète le plus sérieux et le plus triste?"¹¹ If Baudelaire shared the views of this period towards Dante, he was possibly also part of the vogue for the Italian poet. Friederich implies this possibility in passing as he notes the wane of Dante's popularity after the 1850's: "The short and ignoble rôle given Beatrice in Les Fleurs du Mal by Baudelaire indicated that the idealism of the Romantic age was well past."¹² But the Dante vogue seems to have declined slowly for not only does another translation of the Commedia appear in 1855 by H.F.R. de La Mennais but in 1861 the fourth edition of Artaud de Montor's translation is published with the Inferno illustrated by Doré.

As Friederich indicates, in addition to the publication of translations of Dante's works the French authors of the Romantic period propagated a wide interest in the Italian poet through the production of imitations. Alfred de Vigny has two to his name: Eloa, a fragmentary religious epic, and Les Destinées. We can see

¹⁰"Baudelaire's Knowledge and Use of Dante," Op. cit., p. 605.

¹¹Ibid., p. 602.

¹²Friederich, p. 180.

from the titles of Gautier's La Comédie de la Mort and A. Soumet's La Divine Epopée that these works are meant to be taken as imitations of Dante. Viewed in this context we can understand why some critics regard Les Fleurs du Mal as a work following the example of Dante. Thibaudet, Crépet and Blin and Brunelli all look upon the second of the three titles that Baudelaire used for his collection of poems, Les Limbes, as an indication that Baudelaire had Dante in mind.

In addition to producing imitations of Dante's work we know that Gautier also made translations from Petrarch's verse. In Les Fleurs du Mal Baudelaire himself included the Latin poem "Franciscae meae laudes," an imitation of medieval Latin courtly verse. Is it possible that Gautier may have been one of the influences that encouraged Baudelaire to look at Dante's work? We do know that Baudelaire dedicated Les Fleurs du Mal to Gautier with the words:

Au Poëte Impeccable
 Au parfait magicien ès lettres françaises
 A mon très-cher et très vénéré
 Maître et Ami
 Théophile Gautier.

While writers used Dante as a source of forms and themes, painters used him, in their own way, as a fount of inspiration and of subject matter. In 1822 Eugène Delacroix painted "Dante et Virgil aux Enfers." Later we shall examine the great praise that Baudelaire gave this scene from Canto VIII. In 1830 Ary Scheffer displayed his "Paolo et Francesca" and in 1846 "Dante et Béatrice." Edouard de Biefve in 1836 exhibited his "Count Ugolino and his sons in the Tower of Pisa" which again shows the onesided view of Dante as the poet of the

macabre. It must be noted, though, that Delacroix's painting of Canto IV, a scene from limbo, shows that he was aware of the brighter side of Dante. The scene it represents is rather idyllic with bright colours especially blues, greens and gold.

Not only did Baudelaire write art criticism but he seems to have paid particular attention to the work of Delacroix. As we have seen, several critics, Crépet and Blin, Prévost, Patty, Cellier, and Brunelli, feel that Delacroix must have had an important effect on Baudelaire's artistic development. Prévost develops this thesis in great detail¹³ while Patty makes the supposition that Baudelaire first took an interest in Dante because of his enthusiasm for Delacroix.¹⁴

After examining all of Baudelaire's references to Dante, Patty may have been satisfied with his interpretations and conclusion but we do not have to be. If we look closely at the major statements of Baudelaire on Dante we see that two elements stand out: most comments are in relation to Delacroix, and Baudelaire shows an admiration for Dante.

In the Salon de 1845 Baudelaire writes with ardent zeal about Delacroix's 1822 painting of "Dante et Virgile aux Enfers:"

Que l'auteur songe aux clameurs qui accueillirent le
Dante et Virgile, et qu'il persévère dans sa propre voie...
 elle restera dans la mémoire de quiconque a de l'oeil
 et du sentiment; puisse son succès aller toujours
 croissant, car il doit y avoir succès.

¹³"L'Influence d'Eugène Delacroix," in Baudelaire: essai sur la création et l'inspiration poétique. op.cit.

¹⁴Op. cit., p. 604.

Après les tableaux merveilleux de M. Delacroix, celui-ci est véritablement le morceau capital de l'Exposition... le tableau unique du Salon de 1845....¹⁵

Here Baudelaire shows admiration for Delacroix's style but it is not only for the treatment of the picture but also for the subject matter.

In the Salon de 1846 Baudelaire again returns to this painting writing about it at length. First he quotes from a description of the picture by M. Thiers:

Aucun tableau ne révèle mieux, à mon avis l'avenir d'un grand peintre, que celui de M. Delacroix, représentant le Dante et Virgile aux enfers. C'est là surtout qu'on peut remarquer ce jet de talent, cet élan de la supériorité naissante qui ranime les espérances un peu découragées par la mérite trop modéré de tout le reste.

Le Dante et Virgile, conduits par Caron, traversent le fleuve infernal et fendent avec peine la foule qui se presse autour de la barque pour y pénétrer. Le Dante, supposé vivant, a l'horrible teint des lieux; Virgile, couronné d'un sombre laurier, et les couleurs de la mort. Les malheureux, condamnés éternellement à désirer la rive opposée, s'attachent à la barque: l'un la saisit en vain, et renversé par son mouvement trop rapide, est replongés dans les eaux; un autre l'embrasse et repousse avec les pieds ceux qui veulent aborder comme lui; deux autres serrent avec les dents le bois qui leur échappe. Il y a là l'égoïsme de la détresse, le désespoir de l'enfer.¹⁶

With one exception, by now a familiar one, Thiers' description of this especially forceful painting is very faithful both to it and to the scene that the picture represents from Canto VIII:

¹⁵ Oeuvres complètes (Belgique: Editions Gallimard, 1961), p. 820. [This edition is used throughout this thesis].

¹⁶ Oeuvres, pp. 885-886.

Qual è colui che grande inganno ascolta
 che li sia fatto, e poi se ne rammarca,
 Fecesi Flegiàs nell' ira accolta.
 Lo duca mio dicese nella barca,
 e poi mi fece intrare appresso lui;
 e sol quand' io fui dentro parve carica.
 Tosto che 'l duca e io nel legno fui,
 segando se ne va l'antica propria
 dell' acqua più che non suol con altrui.
 Mentre noi corravam la morta gora,
 dinanzi mi si fece un pien di fango,
 e disse: "Chi se' tu che vieni anzi ora?".
 Rispuose: "Vedi che son un che piango".
 E io a lui: "Con piangere e con lutto,
 spirito maladetto, ti rimani;
 ch' i' ti conosco, ancor sie lordo tutto".
 Allora stessee al legno ambo le mani;
 per che 'l maestro accorto lo sospinse,
 dicendo: "Via costà con li altri cani!".

.

Quanti si tengon or là su gran regi
 che qui staranno come porci in brago,
 di sé lasciando orribili dispregi!

.

Dopo ciò poco vid' io quello strazio
 far di costui alle fangose genti
 che Dio ancor ne lodo e ne ringrazio.
 Tutti guidavano: "A Filippo Argenti!";
 e il fiorentino spirito bizzarro
 in sé medesimo si volvea co' denti.
 Quivi il lasciammo, che più non ne narro;
 ma nell' orecchie mi percosse un duolo,
 per ch' io avante l'occhio intento sbarro.¹⁷

As this passage shows, Thiers has made one error: it is not Charon that ferries the two poets across the River Styx rather it is Phlegyas. Thiers does not seem to have checked his facts for he refers to the River Styx with the vague terms "le fleuve infernal." In this one instance Baudelaire apparently accepted the error. I suspect that

¹⁷ La Divina Commedia, ed. Natalino Sapegno (Firenze: "La Nuova Italia" Editrice, 1955), Inferno VIII, 22-66. [This edition is used throughout this thesis].

this is what has lead critics (as we have seen Prévost) to make the same error.

Later in the Salon de 1846 Baudelaire makes some observations about Delacroix which are reminiscent of his sonnet "Correspondances:"

Pour E. Delacroix, la nature est un vaste dictionnaire dont il roule et consulte les feuillets avec un oeil sur et profond; et cette peinture, qui procède surtout du souvenir, parle surtout au souvenir. L'effet produit sur l'âme du spectateur est analogue aux moyens de l'artiste.... Dante et Virgile, par exemple, laisse toujours une impression profonde, dont l'intensité s'acroît par la distance. Sacrifiant sans cesse le détail à l'ensemble, et craignant d'affaiblir la vitalité de sa pensée par la fatigue d'une exécution plus nette et plus calligraphique, il jouit pleinement d'une originalité insaisissable, qui est l'intimité du sujet.¹⁸

Delacroix's painting does make a very powerful impression. As Thiers has pointed out "les couleurs de la mort" are the predominant ones in the picture. Not only are both sky and water a dark brown but also Virgil's face. In violent contrast to these lugubrious tones we have the mad movements of the nude figures attacking the boat. Dante has one hand raised in fear and with the other clutches Virgil.

Later in the same essay Baudelaire speaks of the other painting by Delacroix. It represents a scene from Inferno IV, Virgil presenting Dante to Homer in limbo.

Le plafond circulaire de la bibliothèque du Luxembourg est une oeuvre plus étonnante encore, où le peintre est arrivé --non-seulement à un effet encore plus doux et plus uni, sans rien supprimer des qualités de couleur et de lumière, qui sont le propre de tous ses tableaux, --mais encore s'est révélé sous un aspect tout nouveau: Delacroix paysagiste!

Au lieu de peindre Apollon et les Muses, decoration

¹⁸Oeuvres, pp. 891-892.

invariable des bibliothèques, E. Delacroix a cédé à son goût irrésistible pour Dante....¹⁹

Baudelaire then goes on to quote the controversial forty-eight lines of the canto from the French prose translation of Fiorentino:

Nous ne laissions pas d'aller, tandis qu'il parlait
mais nous traversions toujours la forêt, épaisse forêt
d'esprits, veux-je dire. Nous n'étions pas bien éloignés
de l'entrée de l'abîme, quand je vis un feu qui perçoit
un hémisphère de ténèbres. Quelques pas nous en separaient
encore, mais je pouvais déjà entrevoir que des esprits
glorieux habitaient ce séjour.

.

Le bon maître me dit: -Regarde celui qui marche, une
épée à la main, en avant des trois autres, comme un roi:
c'est Homère, poète souverain; l'autre qui le suit est
Horace le satirique; Ovide est le troisième, et le dernier
est Lucain. Comme chacun d'eux partage avec moi le nom
qu'a fait retentir la voix unanime, ils me font honneur
et ils font bien!

Ainsi je vis se réunir la belle école de ce maître du
chant sublime, qui plane sur les autres comme l'aigle.
Dès qu'ils eurent devisé ensemble quelque peu, ils
se tournèrent vers moi avec un geste de salut, ce qui
fit sourire mon guide. Et ils me firent encore plus
d'honneur, car ils me reçurent dans leur troupe, de sorte
que je fus le sixième parmi tant de génies.²⁰

In an earlier quote Baudelaire spoke of nature as being "un vaste dictionnaire." In this reference he has the image, "nous traversions toujours la forêt, épaisse forêt d'esprits." Do not these citations recall the opening lines from "Correspondances?"

¹⁹Oeuvres, p. 895.

²⁰Oeuvres, pp. 895-896.

La Nature est un temple où de vivant piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
 L'homme y passe à travers de forêts de symboles
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

James S. Patty notes an interesting difference in Baudelaire's quotation from Fiorentino's original translation. The last word in Baudelaire's passage is "génies," the plural, rather than "génie," the singular as it is with Fiorentino. Patty sees this as evidence that Baudelaire was not aware of Dante's original text which also has "senno," a singular. He feels that Baudelaire made the change consciously thinking he was correcting a typographical error in Fiorentino's text.²¹

Whether Baudelaire made the change consciously or not it is interesting to note that he was thinking in the concrete terms of people, "génies," rather than in the abstract quality, "génie." While Dante aspires, by implication, to be included among the great poets of antiquity, even in limbo, Baudelaire shows this wish more explicitly in two places: in the change he has made in the quotation from Fiorentino and in these lines from the poem "Bénédictio"

-Soyez béni, mon Dieu....
 Je sais que vous gardez une place au Poète
 Dans les rangs bienheureux des saintes Légions
 Et que vous l'invitez à l'éternelle fête....

Dante seems to be satisfied that a poet can have a place in limbo while Baudelaire seems to feel that he deserves a place in heaven.

Is it only coincidence that in Baudelaire's transcription there is a change in the key word "génie" and that an aspiration

²¹"Baudelaire's Knowledge and Use of Dante," Op. cit., p. 604.

similar to that of Dante is expressed in "Bénédiction?"

Baudelaire does not see Delacroix merely as a painter but as an interpreter of literature. Thus the French poet admires the work of the French painter for its literary qualities as he explains in "L'Exposition Universelle de 1855:"

Une autre qualité, très-grande, très-vaste, du talent de M. Delacroix, et qu'il fait de lui le peintre aimé des poètes, c'est qu'il est essentiellement littéraire. Non seulement sa peinture a parcouru, toujours avec succès, le champ de hautes littératures, non-seulement elle a traduit, elle a fréquenté Arioste, Byron, Dante....²²

In this essay Baudelaire repeatedly speaks with vehemence about Delacroix's (more infernal) painting of the River Styx crossing: "Dès ses premières productions, dès sa jeunesse (Dante et Virgile aux enfers est de 1822), M. Delacroix fut grand," and "Voici Dante et Virgile, ce tableau d'un jeune homme, qui fut une révolution...."²³

In "L'Oeuvre et la Vie de Delacroix" Baudelaire emphasizes the painter's faithfulness to his sources: "Delacroix fut le traducteur émouvant de Shakespeare, de Dante, de Byron et d'Arioste. Ressemblance importante et différence légère."²⁴ If Baudelaire was able to appreciate the literary nature of Delacroix's work is it not also possible that he experienced the literature itself, first hand? Patty observed that "...it is quite possible that he [Baudelaire] first explored Dante

²²Oeuvres, pp. 973-974.

²³Ibid., pp. 968 and 970 respectively.

²⁴Ibid., p. 1118.

as a result of his admiration for Delacroix."²⁵

Critics have made various suggestions about Baudelaire's borrowings from Dante: from Vivier's weak and vague statement about "une certaine parenté d'esprit et de tempérament" to Brunelli's insistence that Baudelaire took the title "Les Limbes" (and by implication sundry other elements) from Dante. Some critics—Crépet, Blin and Chérix—simply assume that Baudelaire was familiar with Dante's work and thus they point out what naturally seem to be references to Dante's work. Even Patty with all his scepticism and his insistence on an approach based on "rapports de fait" nevertheless admits that he too has found what is an appropriation from Dante:

There is one poem of Baudelaire which seems definitely to bear the imprint of Dante's influence. We find this imprint in the finale of "Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte."

-Descendez, descendez, lamentable victimes,
Descendez le chemin de l'enfer éternel!
Plongez au plus profond du gouffre, où tous les crimes,
Flagellés par un vent qui ne vient pas du ciel,

.

Loin des peuples vivants, errandes, condamnées,
A travers les déserts courez comme des loups;
Faites votre destin, âmes désordonnées
Et fuyez l'infini que vous portez en vous!

Even the most casual student of Dante will recognize at once a striking resemblance between these lines and the scene in Inferno, V, where Dante and Virgil come to the circle of the lustful. The darkness, the eternal agitation, the furious wind whipping the lovers and symbolizing their inner perturbation, remind us vividly of the second circle of Dante's Hell.²⁶

²⁵Op cit., p. 604.

²⁶Patty, Op. cit., p. 609.

While we can point to echoes of the Commedia in Les Fleurs du Mal there is no reliable way of knowing whether these are conscious or unconscious borrowings or simply coincidences. Many allusions could apply just as well to classical mythology or to other literary works that Baudelaire may have read. We know that the light imagery with which this paper shall deal is a common one in literature. Arthur T. Hatto has edited a lengthy book which examines one aspect of the light motif in numerous languages, cultures and periods.²⁷ Therefore since Baudelaire did not leave (as T.S. Eliot did for The Waste Land) an elaborate set of notes to explain his allusions, we must be satisfied with what we can elicit from close reading of the texts.

Although it is not possible to determine how much Baudelaire borrowed from Dante, I think we must accept the strong possibility, as some critics have indicated, that he took some of the references that have been mentioned. And even if we accept only the very minimum degree of appropriation that Patty is willing to give to the relationship, I think that we must admit that the complex nature of Baudelaire's knowledge and use of Dante is one most peculiar to the eclectic French poet.

The last problem with which we shall deal in this chapter is the theory and practice of influence study as it applies to the Dante-Baudelaire question. Even if we were to accept the maximum amount of borrowing by Baudelaire from Dante, would this necessarily

²⁷Eos: An Enquiry into the Theme of Lover's Meetings and Partings at Dawn in Poetry (London: Mouton and Co., 1965).

make the relationship one of influence, as this notion is understood in Comparative Literature scholarship? Let us look at some recent pronouncements by comparatists on the question of influence.

In 1958 Haskell M. Block²⁸ examined previous arguments by Wellek, Levin and Hassan against influence studies but nevertheless went on to argue that such studies are one of the central preoccupations of Comparative Literature and that the over-emphasis on the empirical investigation of "rapports de fait" and causality may prevent us from direct confrontation with the works themselves and their analysis. The old strict concept of influence Block sees as too limited in scope to deal with literary relations based on the convergence of text and tradition. We have seen this more liberal approach in the work of A.P. Bertocci, M. Musa, J.P. Houston and G. Cambon.

But at the same time there are critics who differ with Block and hold fast to the old empiricism. Claudio Guillén defines influence "as a recognizable and significant part of the genesis of a literary work of art," and goes on to explain that influences "represent a kind of intrusion into the writer's being or a modification of it...."²⁹ Guillén goes on to emphasize the importance of making a distinction between influences and textual similarities and the necessity of scrutinizing how the two are related. The author maintains that

²⁸"The Concept of Influence in Comparative Literature," Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature, VII (1958), pp. 30-37.

²⁹"The Aesthetics of Influence Studies," Comparative Literature: Proceedings of the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), p. 181.

echoes and parallels from one literary work in another are not necessarily evidence of influence. And thus he insists that elements of influence must be "connected to the central stream of genetic development to which influences necessarily belong... their function, not their dimension, is relevant."³⁰ Thus Guillén would generally agree with Patty's approach but not with that of Musa and Houston. To Guillén the fact that we can find numerous verbal parallels in Les Fleurs du Mal to Dante's Commedia—the title of the French poem itself; the images of darkness, demons and wild beasts in "Au Lecteur;" the prayer and light images in "Bénédiction;" the dark, talking forest of symbols in "Correspondances;" the images of light, angels, the River Lethé, the lake of blood and the dark wood in "Les Phares;" the stone weights, the tombs and flowers in "Le Guignon;" the references to Charon the boatman, nude women, tombs and darkness in "Don Juan aux Enfers" and many more—does not necessarily show the influence of the Commedia on the genesis of these poems.

Like I.H. Hassan³¹ before him, Guillén maintains that the components of the genesis of a work of art are psychological in nature. Guillén himself, though, mentions some of the difficulties that are inherent in his approach: When does the psychological influence begin? When does the genesis begin? How do we determine influence if it takes place while the work is already in progress?

³⁰Ibid., p. 185.

³¹"The Problems of Influence in Literary History: Notes Towards a Definition," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XIV (1955), p. 73.

Guillén, nevertheless, posits that the two steps in an influence study are: first, the determination of the genetic function of the influence by the accumulation of a mass of data on the author's life, his psychological make-up, social and historical milieu. The second step is textual comparison.

Along similar lines as Guillén, Anna Balakian³² distinguishes between the notions of literary reputation, the reception of an author or work, and its influence. Thus Dante was very popular in France during the Romantic period but does it necessarily follow that he was also very influential as André Pézard and Werner Friederich seem to imply? And even if Dante was influential was this exercised on Baudelaire himself?

Like Patty, Hassan, and Guillén, Balakian's notion of influence is founded on empiricism. But ironically this notion of influence is also based on what I feel are unprofessional psychological assumptions:

Influences must not be weighed by their multiplicity or sheer bulk but by their intensity. Studies of this nature bear close relation to psychological analysis and involve questions of language and aesthetics. One has to distinguish the exterior evidence from the fundamental imprint. Even when the proof is at hand, it becomes essential to determine its importance relative to the whole work....³³

As empirical as the Guillén and Balakian method of influence study would lead us to believe it is, it nevertheless takes us into the foggy realm of amateur psychoanalysis at a distance. The authors

³²"Influence and Literary Fortune," Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature, XI (1962), pp. 24-31.

³³Ibid., p. 29.

may not only be removed from us by time but also by language and tradition. Facts about an author's life, let alone his personality, may be questionable, incomplete and contradictory. Is it not safer to begin with the text, fallible as it may be, as the first step in an influence study? And then, if desired, we could move on to biographical material as the second possible step. I would agree with Wellek when he says that: "the literary work of art itself will be the necessary focus and we will recognize that we study different problems when we examine the relation of a work of art to the psychology of the author or the sociology of his society."³⁴

If we were to accept Guillén and Balakian's strict definition of influence we would have to conclude that the Dante-Baudelaire case cannot be an influence study since it does not meet all their qualifications. As we have outlined the relation between the work of Dante and that of Baudelaire, we can see that it is not possible at this time to show that Dante's work had a significant effect on the genesis of Baudelaire's poem. It is even difficult to prove factually to what extent Baudelaire had read Dante. We cannot go far beyond Patty's findings of what is factually provable, that there are some affinities between the works of the two poets.

Whether the Dante-Baudelaire study can be one of influence or not, is there any value in examining parallels in the works of the two poets? I believe that we are justified in undertaking such a study

³⁴"The Crisis of Comparative Literature," Comparative Literature: Proceedings of the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), p. 158.

for several reasons: The number of critics who have alluded to affinities between Dante and Baudelaire warrant conducting a comparative study, especially since an intensive study has not yet been made. Patty himself feels that his own examination was not an exhaustive one but only the first step " so that in the future more solid structures of criticism can be raised."³⁵ An affinity study will help us to get a greater appreciation and understanding of the works of both poets.

Limiting notions of factually provable influence should not be allowed to prevent us from undertaking such comparative studies as those exemplified by the Dante-Baudelaire case. The present trend in Comparative Literature seems to be away from the restrictions of "le Positivisme" as H.M. Block observes in a recent publication:

Les affinités et les parallélismes ahistoriques, habilement élucidées, peuvent améliorer notre compréhension des conventions et des genres littéraires et projeter une lumière sur les grandes similitudes de pensée et d'expression dans des domaines linguistiques et géographiques bien distincts. Ce mode d'étude est délicat et difficile.... [mais il peut] parfois présenter plus d'intérêt que les descriptions de rapports historiques fondés sur des observations purement empiriques. Nous devons seulement exiger que de telles études soient basées sur des connaissances solides et qu'elles tiennent compte de l'individualité de la littérature considérée.

.

On est de plus en plus conscient, dans les études comparatistes, de la valeur intrinsèque de l'oeuvre d'art individuelle ainsi que du rôle essentiel de l'interprétation stylistique et structurelle. Cette prise de conscience constitue, à mon avis, la tendance nouvelle la plus

³⁵Patty, Op. cit., p. 602.

importante en littérature comparée.³⁶

La limitation des études comparatistes au domaine des faits est en train de disparaître et la réduction des rapports de fait à un rôle secondaire est inévitable.³⁷

³⁶ Nouvelles tendances en littérature comparée (Paris: Editions A.-G. Nizet, 1970), pp. 26-27.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

CHAPTER IV

LA SELVA OSCURA, LA FORET DE SYMBOLES:

TWO PERSONAL HELLS

Hell is present in the first lines of both La Divina Commedia and Les Fleurs du Mal. Dante creates an overwhelming sense of evil in the first seven lines of the Inferno by his repetition of images of darkness and words that connote obscurity:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita.
Ah quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspera e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!
Tant'è amara che poco e più morte;

The tension in these lines builds until it is partially released with the words "paura" and "morte." The pilgrim is made aware and fearful of evil by the gloom. To this emotional state of dismay is added the suggestion of death. The poet has carefully created a mood of blackness in these lines. The "selva oscura" is clearly an image of darkness; the forbidding character of this dark wood is reinforced by the modifiers "selvaggia e aspera e forte." Not only is it dark but also wild, harsh and difficult to travel. The third line is not only an elaboration of the "cammin di nostra vita" but also a reverberation of the "oscura" image of line two. While "smarrita" with "via" means the way was lost or confused it also has

an archaic meaning, one still popular in dialects, which is "discolored; faded, of light or color." Thus "smarrita" also connotes obscurity. The word "amara" when associated with "morte" has the force not just of bitter but of agonizing. The state of darkness represents the state of sin, since light represents the state of grace. Therefore Hell is in these lines in the darkness, the sin, the evil, the death.

In strong contrast with this darkness and hell we have light, a taste of heaven, in the next few lines:

Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto,
 la dove terminava quella valle
 che m'avea di paura il cor compunto,
 guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle
 vestite già de raggi del pianeta
 Allor fu la paura un poco queta
 che nel lago del cor m'era durata
 la notte ch'i' passai con tanta pietà.
 (13-21)

The pilgrim is in darkness but he looks up, a symbolic gesture repeated at the end of the Inferno, and can see the "dilettoso monte" showered with the light of the sun. With the light within sight the pilgrim is comforted in his dark "notte" of sin and fear. The striking light image is that of "raggi," rays of light, a recurrent one in Dante's poem. These rays of light are from "il pianeta," the planet sun, a symbol of God. In the Convivio III, xii, 52-56 Dante has written:

Nullò sensibile in tutto 'l mondo è più degno di farsi
 esempio di Dio, che 'l sole, le quale di sensibile luce
 sè prima e poi tutti i corpi celestiali ed elementali

allumina.¹

This sun "mena dritto," draws us forward and straight. Its rays then are like golden threads that guide us back to God. The golden thread of life is an ancient symbol in many cultures.²

It is interesting to note that "raggio" seems to be etymologically connected to "ragione," reason. This suggests that the light of reason is our guide through life. We see later that the pilgrim's guiding light through hell is Virgil who also symbolizes reason. We can therefore appreciate how intricately connected the different levels of meaning are to the light and dark imagery in the Commedia.

The two perspectives of hell, the personal and the social, are simultaneously represented in the Commedia as can be seen in the opening lines. We have "nostra vita," the shared point of view, and also "mi," the pilgrim's individual view point. Though they are related to one another and to the various levels of meaning of the poem, we shall deal primarily with the individual perspective in this chapter.

In "Au Lecteur," the opening poem of Les Fleurs du Mal, Baudelaire too evokes a vision of hell with a blasphemous verbal explosion:

¹In Tutte le opere di Dante Alighieri eds. E. Moore and Paget Toynbee (London: Oxford University Press, 1904), Cf. Paradiso XXVIII, 16-42.

²"Symbolism" in Dictionary of World Literature ed. Joseph T. Shipley (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1970), pp. 322-325.

La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,
 Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps,
 Et nous alimentons nos aimables remords,
 Comme les mendiants nourrissent leur vermine.

Nos péchés sont têtus, nos repentirs sont lâches;
 Nous nous faisons payer grassement nos aveux,
 Et nous rentrons gaïement dans le chemin bourbeux,
 Croyant par de vils pleurs laver toutes nos taches.

Sur l'oreiller du mal c'est Satan Trismégiste

.

C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent!
 Aux objets répregnants nous trouvons des appas;
 Chaque jour vers l'Enfer nous descendons d'un pas,
 Sans horreur, à travers des ténèbres qui puent.

.

Et, quand nous respirons, la Mort dans nos poumons
 Descend, fleuve invisible, avec des sourdes plaintes.

While Baudelaire refers to the devil and to hell directly he also creates an atmosphere of evil by the references to sin and darkness. We do not have a dark wood but we do have "le chemin bourbeux." Dante is in darkness and is trying to move towards the "dilettoso monte," and therefore demonstrates his hope in the power of God. Baudelaire instead shows total pessimism as he descends each day deeper into hell. The French poet is without fear or hope, totally dead to emotion in this poem. The atmosphere of evil is so thick that we can breathe it into our lungs like death. We see that like Dante, Baudelaire too refers to the experience of Death in his catalogue of evil.

In this nightmarish hell Baudelaire refers to the Devil holding the strings which control our actions like those of marionettes.

It is interesting to note that this very specific image of the thread of life could also occur in Baudelaire's poem. Dante's thread of light is his ray of hope, his life rope back to God. To Baudelaire the threads, manipulated by the devil, are another sign of despair. Baudelaire therefore has inverted the image. In this hell we have lost not only hope but also freedom.

In the Inferno Dante's pilgrim has freedom. He flees out of the dark wood and towards the "diletto monte" but finds his path blocked:

Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar dell'erta,
 una lonza leggiere e presta molto,
 che di pel maculato era coverta;
 e non mi si partia d'innanzi al volto,
 anzi impediva tanto il mio c'ammينو,
 ch 'i' fui per ritornar più volte volto.
 Temp'era dal principio del mattino,
 e 'l sol montava 'n su con quelle stelle
 ch eran con lui quando l'amor divino
 messe di prima quelle cose belle;
 si ch'a bene sperar m'era cagione
 di quella fera alla gaetta pelle
 l'ora del tempo e la dolce stagione;
 ma non si che paura non mi disse
 la vista che m'apparve d'un leone.
 Questi pareva che contra me venesse
 con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame,
 si che pareache l'aere ne temesse.
 Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
 sembiava carica nella sua magrezza,
 e molte genti fe' già viver grame,
 questa mi pose tanto di gravezza
 con la paura ch'uscia di sua vista
 ch 'io perdei la speranza dell' altezza.

.

mi ripigneua là dove 'l sol tace.

(31-34 and 60)

The three beasts that prevent the pilgrim from going forward are

embodiments of the three vices that the poet recognizes in himself: the lonza (panther) represents lust and luxury, the lion pride and the she-wolf avarice. The beasts are powerful in appearance because these vices are most powerful within the pilgrim. But there are variations of degree between the three animals. The panther is not as horrible in appearance as the other two animals. She is spotted, not black, and is said to be "gaetta" a word that has almost the force of "attractive." The panther seems, therefore, to represent significant blemishes in the pilgrims past rather than a black record of sin. This is supported by the lines that follow the appearance of the panther. The time is early morning at sunrise, the light is associated with the love of God and the time with "la dolce stagione." This suggests to us that the vice is one of his youth, one which he is still hopeful of overcoming with God's help. But with the appearance of the other two beasts which are fiercer the pilgrim becomes more apprehensive, loses all hope of reaching his high goal and shrinks back into the darkness. The situation is changed with the appearance of Virgil bringing hope and reason. The pilgrim needs the help of Virgil since he realizes that he cannot overcome these weaknesses alone.

In "Au Lecteur" Baudelaire also openly admits his personal evil though he is more pessimistic than Dante. Like the Italian poet he objectifies this evil into fierce beasts:

Mais parmi les chacals, les panthères, les lices,
 Les singes, les scorpions, les vautours, les serpents,
 Les monstres glapissants, hurlants, grognants rampants

Dans la ménagerie infâme de nos vices,

.

C'est l'Ennui! —l'oeil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,
—Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!

With Baudelaire there is no one to one relationship between the beasts and human vices. The animals form a wild menagerie of monsters that infest the mind of man. These monsters are associated with demons, "Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons," and thus are creatures of hell.

Like Dante, Baudelaire identifies with the reader but in addition openly invites him to a mutual recognition of the darker side of man's nature, the evil in "nostra vita." Baudelaire's world, then, does not seem to radiate from the luminous creator like that of Dante but from the luminous one, Lucifer. And while he too retreats into the darkness like Dante he has a note of blacker despair: "Et nous rentrons galement dans le chemin bourbeux."

Baudelaire identifies the evil as "Ennui." But is this evil a product of the devil alone or is man a party to it? Are we all really hypocrites? Is mankind, after all, only a self-perpetrating and paradoxically self-annihilating conspiracy of evil, a fraternity of darkness?

While Dante's journey begins from a point of implicit though fearful optimism, as the light imagery indicates, Baudelaire's expedition into the darkest recesses of the interior seems to begin from a point of pessimism. But does not the presence of darkness and

pessimism also suggest the existence of light and hope? Is not this implication made more conspicuous by their absence in "Au Lecteur?"

As T.S. Eliot points out speaking of Baudelaire's Satanism:

When Baudelaire's Satanism is dissociated from its less creditable paraphernalia, it amounts to a dim intuition of a part, but a very important part, of Christianity. Satanism itself, so far as not merely an affectation, was an attempt to get into Christianity by the back door. Genuine blasphemy, genuine in spirit and not purely verbal, is the product of partial belief, and is as impossible to the complete atheist as to the perfect Christian. It is a way of affirming belief.³

This is the kind of irony that gives Baudelaire's poetry the moral dimension which makes its comparison to Dante's poetry profitable. Thus while the epithet "Hypocrite" at the end of "Au Lecteur" seems to suggest that the poet sees man as innately evil we know that Baudelaire also recognizes the existence of the opposing forces of good and evil, "spleen et idéal," struggling for control of man:

La lutte des deux principes qui ont choisi le coeur humain pour principal champ de bataille, c'est-à-dire de la chair avec l'esprit, de l'enfer avec le ciel de Satan avec Dieu.⁴

We can see the results of a juxtaposition of selected parts of the Inferno and Les Fleurs du Mal: not only differences but also striking similarities are revealed. Before we go on to further

³"Baudelaire" in Selected Essays 1917-1932, op. cit., p. 369.

⁴"Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser," in Oeuvres, op. cit., p. 1223.

comparisons of details, a few general remarks are in order about Dante's allegory and Dante and Baudelaire's light imagery.

Both in his letter to Can Grande della Scalla and in the second book of the Convivio⁵ Dante explained the four-fold meaning of his allegories; the literal level gives the reader the narration of the action; the allegorical level gives the meaning which this action illustrates; the moral level shows the reader the proper course of action in life and conduct; and finally, the anagogical level places the action into the total scheme of the Christian cosmos: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Judgement. Dante uses color and light-dark imagery in an unambiguous manner to communicate these four levels of meaning. In the Divina Commedia light is usually associated with the sun, stars, day, warmth, comfort, reason, life, grace, love, order, and God. Light, therefore, comes to represent all that is good both spiritually and temporally. On the other hand darkness--the absence of light--is associated with night, coldness, obscurity suffering, disorder, death, sin, and Satan. Darkness comes to represent evil. The light-dark imagery, then, functions on all four levels of meaning.

This dichotomy of darkness and light and their symbolism is described in the opening words of the Book of Genesis:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

⁵Op. cit., II, i, 14-65.

And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.... And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters."⁶.... And God called the firmament Heaven.

Dante alludes to this act of creation in these lines which we have already seen in Canto I:

e 'l sol montana 'n su con quella stelle
 ch eran con lui quando l'amor divino
 mosse di prima quelle cose belle.

(38-40)

In the New Testament and in the Commedia, as we shall see, light represents not only the power and love of God but also the incarnation of this love in the person of Christ.

Light is a central recurrent image in both The Bible and the Commedia. In both works it functions on more than one level. In Dante's poem the light-dark imagery gives all four levels of meaning salience. The pilgrim's journey from the dark wood, down through hell, up through purgatory and through heaven is a narrative of an epic on the literal level, a vision of the afterlife on the allegorical level, a lesson on the moral level and a reaffirmation of God's divine plan for man in the universe on the anagogical level.

It is more difficult to categorize Baudelaire's use of light-dark imagery in Les Fleurs du Mal. Unlike Dante he uses this imagery in a more complex and more ambivalent manner. Sometimes

⁶The Holy Bible, prepared by the Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain, (Toronto: Thomas Nelsons and Sons, 1966), Genesis I: 1-8. Cf. John I: 1-21.

Baudelaire follows polarities similar to those of Dante: light represents goodness and darkness means evil. But at other times he also reverses the values of these images so that darkness has a positive value. We may be able to penetrate into the darkness of our psyche and to confront the causes of our ennui and suffering. Light, on the other hand, may have a negative value if it is blinding and does not permit us to see clearly. The light of reason may be destructive if it results in blind pride—Lucifer means "the luminous one." Thus sunlight is at times associated with death by Baudelaire. In "Danse macabre" we have "sous tout soleil, la Mort t'admire..." And in "La Mort des Artistes" we see the flower image:

C'est que la Mort, planant comme un soleil nouveau,
Fera s'épanouir les fleurs de leur cerveau!

In the light the flowers bloom but every minute of their flourishing brings them closer to their death. The role of the sun and light is an ambivalent one as we can see in "Le Soleil" in which the action of "le soleil cruel" is associated to that of the artist, "ainsi qu'un poète, il descend dans les villes. Il ennoblit le sort des choses les plus viles." Thus while light exposes the ugly reality of things it also beautifies them at the same time.⁷

After the prefatory poem "Au Lecteur" we move to "Spleen et Idéal" which is the first and the largest section of Les Fleurs du Mal.

⁷ See Marc Eigeldinger, "La Symbolique solaire dans la poésie de Baudelaire" and Gérard Antoine "La Nuit Chez Baudelaire," both in Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France, LXVII, 2 (1967), pp. 356-374 and 375-401.

In the first poems of this section Baudelaire presents us with several themes: the poet as exile, the value of personal suffering, the symbolism of nature, and the spiritual value of art.

In "Bénédiction" Baudelaire shows that the poet is chosen by God from birth to suffer the burden of his artistic vocation: he is cursed by his mother and later rejected by wife and society. But in suffering this exile the poet earns the reward of heavenly bliss. In aspiring to reach paradise Baudelaire uses light imagery that is reminiscent of Dante's description of heaven in terms of traditional Mediaeval cosmology.

- "Soyez béni, mon Dieu, qui donnez la souffrance
Comme un divin remède à nos impuretés
Et comme la meilleurs et la plus pure essence
Qui prépare les forts aux saintes voluptés!

Je sais que vous gardez une place au Poète
Dans les rangs bienheureux des saintes Légions,
Et que vous l'invitez à l'éternelle fête
Des Trônes, des Vertus, des Dominations."

These lines express the poet's belief in the value of suffering and his acceptance of this suffering as a necessary condition for the purgation of sin and as a kind of initiation into the communion of heaven.

In this poem the allusions to flames and to hell are in contrast to the images of illumination, thus showing the struggle between the forces of darkness and those of light, between "spleen et idéal." This struggle is given an added dimension with the notion of the divine madness of the poet:

Pourtant, sous la tutelle invisible d'un Ange,
L'Enfant déshérité s'enivre de soleil,

Et dans tout ce qu'il boit et dans tout ce qu'il mange
Retrouve l'ambroisie et le nectar vermeil.

The poet, intoxicated with the sun, the divine light, experiences the world with heightened awareness. The spiritual exaltation of these poems is as close as Baudelaire ever gets to heaven before he sinks under the force of spleen. To realize his aspirations toward "les rangs bienheureux" the poet must fight against his own personal weakness. The personal suffering that the poet experiences as a result of his exile and his constant struggle, a struggle which the forces of light seem to lose as the poems progress, makes the poet agonize through a personal hell.

Likewise in Canto I of Dante's Inferno we encounter the theme of exile and personal suffering in at least three cases: Dante, Virgil and Aeneas. Dante himself suffers because of his exile from his home city of Florence. Virgil and the other classical poets which he represents are suffering the isolation of limbo and the neglect of their homelands. When Virgil first appears to the frightened pilgrim he is described as:

dinanzi alli occhi mi su fu offerto
chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco.

(62-63)

The adjective "fioco," dim, is a subtle use of synaesthesia by Dante, for the word can have both an auditory or optical import.⁸ At first the image of Virgil appears dim, befitting a spirit from limbo, but

⁸ Glauco Cambon, "Synaesthesia in the Divine Comedy." op. cit., p. 4.

the words "lungo silenzio" also suggest that the pilgrim could not hear him clearly. By "lungo silenzio" and "fioco" Dante seems to be suggesting that the word of Virgil has been neglected for a long time and that as a result the man's spirit has faded out of the range of sight and sound. Virgil then, is an exile in both heaven and earth: as an inhabitant of limbo and as a forgotten poet.

This motif of exile is amplified when Virgil makes a reference to Aeneas, who was left homeless, exiled in a sense, when Troy was captured and burned. But Aeneas is not only a symbol of exile but also of heroic personal suffering endured in the execution of his divinely ordained mission, the founding of a new Troy (Rome). Immediately juxtaposed to this allusion to Aeneas is Virgil's question to Dante:

Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia?
perché non sali il dilettoso monte
ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?

Dante therefore is reminded of his mission. Like Aeneas who visited the underworld to see Dido, Dante is destined to see Beatrice, to reach the top of Mount Purgatory, by first suffering the vision of hell. It is Dante's personal weakness, represented by the three beasts, that make him unable to fulfil his mission alone.

Baudelaire elaborates on the persecution that the exiled poet endures in "L'Albatros." Both poet and albatros suffer for being what they are. But both suffer only on the terrestrial level. In this short poem the conflict between the dark depths of hell and the blue heights of heaven is communicated by the contrasting

color imagery. The albatros is first called one of the "vastes oiseaux des mers" which suggests to us a wide blue sea. But the "gouffres amers" suggest the dark, forbidding depths of the sea, of hell. The epithet "rois de l'azur" brings us up into the blueness of the heavens with the "grandes ailes blanches." The "prince des nuées" also connotes whiteness which is contrasted with the storm clouds of "la tempête."

In this struggle for "l'azur" the human, earth-bound poet suffers because he can only aspire to the infinite bliss. He is kept down on earth by his material appendages, his weak body. The striking paradox is that the albatros's wings, his instruments of flight, are the very limbs which make his movement on earth awkward. In a sense then it is the great white artistic wings of the poet that impede his movement on the terrestrial plane.

In "Elévation" Baudelaire maintains the theme of artistic suffering and aspirations by the use of additional images of light and water:

Par delà le soleil, par delà les éthers,
Par delà les confins des sphères étoilées

Mon esprit, tu te meus avec agilité
Et, comme un bon nageur qui se pâme dans l'onde,
Tu sillones gaïement l'immensité profonde
Avec une indicible et mâle volupté.

It is interesting that this image of the soul as a swimmer is also found early in Canto I. Dante has used it though not as an example of glorious and defiant motion over the dangerous and dark depths but to communicate the peril and fear of his own escape from the dark,

evil wood:

E comme quoi che con lena affannata
uscito fuor del pelago alla riva
si volge all'acqua perigliosa e guata
così l'animo mio, ch' ancor fuggiva,
si volse a retro a rimar lo passo
che non lasciò già mai persona viva.
(22-27)

In the Inferno the dark wood is on one level a symbol of the experience of personal hell. The forest is a type of the lost Garden of Eden, lost through Adam's personal sin. We could say then that the garden of paradise became the dark wood when man lost his preternatural gifts. But the poet, though he is a man and therefore also lost in the dark wood, can transcend the blackness. His imagination may help him to see reflections of the beyond in the mundane elements of this temporal existence. Dante did so with Christian faith, and with his love for Beatrice both of which inspired his artistic work. Thus the first basic incentive for writing the Commedia was to glorify a woman. This Dante tells us at the end of the Vita Nuova:

Apparve a me una mirabil visione, nella quale vidi cose, che mi fecero proporre di non dir più di questa benedetta, infino a tanto che io non potessi più degnamente trattare di lei.... Sicchè, se piacere sarà di Colui, per cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita per alquanti anni duri, spero di dire di lei quello che mai non fu detto d'alcuna.⁹

The Commedia then, was written to bear witness to the purification of love in the heart of a man. This movement of love is complemented

⁹Tutte le opere di Dante Alighieri, op. cit., Vita Nuova, 43.

by the spiritual purification of the pilgrim from the dark wood of sin to the bright paradise of grace.

Baudelaire's poem is inspired by the idea of a search, a search for a path to "l'azur," an escape from infernal spleen. As has been observed Baudelaire only briefly looked at faith in God as a solution. He next turned to what we could call the religion of art, but there too he did not seem to find the complete answer. In "Correspondances" Baudelaire indicates a formula for imaginatively transcending the material limits of existence. On the artistic level synaesthesia is successful but it is not totally so on the spiritual level.

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

This very powerful image of life as a passage across a forest of symbols—living, talking symbols—has a parallel in the Inferno.

In Canto XIII Dante tells us:

Quando noi ci mettemmo per un bosco
che da nessun sentiero era segnato.
Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco.
(2-4)

While he and Virgil are in this dark wood which has no marked

path¹⁰ Dante says that he hears

tante voci uscisser tra quei bronchi
da gente che per noi si nascondesse.

(26-27)

The pilgrim soon learns that these voices are not from people that are hiding but come from the trees themselves which are metamorphosed sinners. These sinners escaped from the freedoms of life by suicide and have now been condemned to live forever in hell as trees infested by harpies.

Dante, then, is in an allegorical forest: the trees are portents of possible punishments to come. This forest is also one of symbols, warning signs, lessons to be learned before the pilgrim proceeds further. In this dark wood as in that at the beginning of the Inferno there is no escape. The sinners are petrified forever and Dante must pass through the forest in order to proceed on through hell.

In both the wood of Dante and that of Baudelaire there is darkness, and the sounds of voices, from the trees, are confused by echoes and the distances. But while Dante's use of darkness is unambiguous, Baudelaire has the paradoxical image of "unité,/ Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté." The distinction between darkness and light and between their effects and symbolic values seems to be confused. Night and daylight have achieved unity.

The synaesthetic experience of the artist in "Correspondances"

¹⁰ Notice the recurrent image of the "selva oscura" and "la diritta via smarrita".

seems to be a minute foreshadowing of an apocalyptic synthesis of all creation. The divine separation of the light from the darkness that we saw in the description of creation in Genesis is here reversed. Baudelaire has also altered Dante's world picture by transporting the forest of talking trees from hell to earth. Despite the apparent inversion of the traditional order of things we can see that Baudelaire's vision of an ultimate unity has echoes from the Neo-Platonic vision of the final return of all things to the point of origin. We shall examine this vision in the next chapter.

After seeking escape from his suffering in the extasies of art Baudelaire looks for relief in various affairs with seductive "Béatrices." As the poet gives in to his baser nature the light images in the poems seem to become more dim. From the luminous heavens of "Bénédiction," and "Elévation" we move to the "soleil monotone" in "Parfum Exotique." From the radiant extasies of art Baudelaire falls to the dark extasies of sensuality. In "La Chevelure" the poet wallows in the blackness of "ce soir l'alcôve obscure," "ce noir océan," and "cheveux bleus, pavillon de ténébres tendues." The hair is called a "forêt aromatique" an image that suggests not only the gigantic proportions of the black passion that has overwhelmed the poet but also echoes the dark forest of personal evil.

But the fleeting delights of sensuality turn into a hell, for the poet ends "Sed non satiata" with the image "dans l'enfer de ton lit." The darkness increases as we descend deeper into the pit of the insatiable sexual vice in "De profundis clamavi."

Here the poet finds himself in the "fond du gouffre obscur," with "un soleil sans chaleur...les six autres mois la nuit couvre la terre."

An image that again suggests the dark forest of personal evil, a dark wood reminiscent of Canto I of the Inferno, is used by Baudelaire in "Duellum:"

Dans le ravin hanté des chats-pards et des onces

.

- Ce gouffre, c'est l'enfer, de nos amis pueplé!

This infernal pit, like the hell of Dante is full of familiar faces and monsters. For Dante's "lonza" we have "des onces."

While the poet has moments of luminous ecstasy as he looks into the dark eyes of his mistresses:

Charmants yeux, vous brillez de la clarté mystique
Qu'ont les cierges brûlants en plein jour; le soleil
Rougit, mais n'éteint pas leur flamme fantastique.
(Le Flambeau Vivant)

he nevertheless finds himself slowly sinking "Vers un gouffre obscurci de miasmes humains" (Le Flacon).

In contrast to Baudelaire's carnal Beatrices Dante's madone are powerful inspirations that help him to endure the trip through hell. They are not a means of escaping the reality of his personal sins but an encouragement to repent for them. Thus in Canto II when Virgil mentions Beatrice and Lucia, Dante is given new courage to push on (127-132). These ladies too have "occhi

lucenti" but the light is a reflection of God's grace not of sexual passion. Lucia's name suggests light, the Latin "lux" and the Italian "luce," and thus she, as the patron saint of weak sight, is an image of divine illumination.

Baudelaire continues to be enveloped by darkness: "Le soleil s'est couvert d'un crépe" (Le Possédé), "un soleil couchant dans un ciel nébuleux" (Le poison), and in "L'invitation au voyage!"

Les soleils mouillés
De ces ciels brouillés

.

Les soleils couchants.

The poet loses hope in the effects of sensuality and suffers the regrets of his dissipated past. His spleen is communicated not only by images of obscurity but also by images of blood, images that seem to echo the Inferno:

De grands seaux pleins du sang et des larmes des morts
(Le Tonneau de la Haine)

Au bord d'un lac de sang....
(La Cloche Fêlée)

Thus as with Dante the acute suffering of his hell is intensified by the visions of blood. Spleen places the poet

dans ces bains de sang...

.

Où coule au lieu de sang l'eau verte du Léthé.
(LXXVII Spleen)

The poet would like to abolish memory; memory makes him suffer guilt.

Like the damned in Dante's Inferno the poet finds himself

Dans un styx bourbeux et plombé
Où nul oeil du Ciel ne pénètre

.

Un damné descendant sans lampe,
Au bord d'un gouffre dont l'odeur
Trahit l'humide profondeur

(L'Irrémédiable)

The haunting regret makes the poet's life a hell, a hell in which one who is familiar with the Inferno cannot help but see reflections of Dante's vision. Thus in "L'Irréparable" we have:

Pouvons-nous étouffer le vieux, le long Remords,
Qui vit, s'agite et se tortille,
Et se nourrit de nous comme le ver des morts,

.

L'Irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite
Notre âme...

These lines seem to echo the scene in which Ugolino is gnawing on Ruggieri's head:

Io vidi due ghiacciati in una buca,
si che l'un capro all'altro era cappello;
e come 'l pan per fame si manduca,
così 'l sovràn li denti all'altro pose
là 've 'l cervel s'aggiuque con la nuca.
(XXXII, 125-129)

As in Baudelaire's poem Ugolino too seems to be a personification of regret. This pair of gruesome traitors has a parallel pair earlier in the Inferno. Paolo and Francesca, the lustful sinners, are also gnawed by regret for their punishment but not for their sin.

In Dante's hell as in that of Baudelaire there is no hope.
We are reminded of the dark inscription on the gates of hell:

Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate

by these lines from "L'Irréparable:"

L'Espérance qui brille aux carreaux de l'Auberge
Est soufflée, est morte à jamais!
Sans lune et sans rayons...

.

Le Diable a tout éteint aux carreaux de l'Auberge!

After failing to find the path to "l'idéal" in art, and sensuality the poet turns to the common experiences of urban life. But Paris too seems to have shadows and echoes from the city of Dis. In "Tableaux Parisiens" the imagery of obscured lighting continues to reflect the spiritual void of the poet, but with greater ambiguity than before. Thus in "Le Soleil" the sun is cruel and enriching at the same time.

The image of the dark wood of personal evil recurrns in "Le Cygne" where the poet realizes that even in the city he is really

Ainsi dans la forêt où mon esprit s'exile
Un vieux souvenir sonne à plein souffle du cor!
Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île,
Aux captifs, aux vaincus!... a bien d'autres encor!

The city, like hell, is a place where "un brouillard sale et jaune inondait tout l'espace," (Les Sept Vieillards). Thus in this urban dark wood as in that of "Au Lecteur" we have objectifications of personal evil haunting the poet. "Volupté noir! des sept péchés

capitaux" (A une Madone).

The intensity of the despair in this experience is again captured with the use of blood images in addition to those of obscurity. Thus in "Le Crépuscule du matin" even the sunrise has an empty, cold pallor:

Où, comme un oeil sanglant qui palpite et qui bouge,
La lampe sur le jour fait une tache rouge;

.

Comme un sanglot coupé par un sang écumeux.

The blood images appear like permanent stains in the vision of the poet, stains of life, death and perhaps of original sin.

After the city the poet tries to escape through the intoxication of alcohol, through varieties of sexual perversion but all to no avail. The final solution to his hell is to escape through death.

C'est la Mort qui console, hélas! et qui fait vivre;
C'est le but de la vie, c'est le seul espoir
Qui, comme un élixir, nous monte et nous enivre,
Et nous donne le coeur de marcher jusqu'au soir.
(La Mort des Pauvres)

The consolation of death, the final relief, is what makes the poet endure his hell. While Dante had the faith to choose life, temporal life and the everlasting life hereafter, Baudelaire chooses death and darkness. He waits for the "oubli" of blackness to envelope him at last:

La nuit voluptueuse monte,
Apaisant tout, même la faim,

Effaçant tout, même la honte,
Le poète se dit: "Enfin!

.

O rafraichissantes ténèbres!"

The final disillusionment and despair in "Le Voyage" is acutely brought fourth by the echoes of images in the rest of Les Fleurs du Mal and by the restatement of universal evil that opens the poem in "Au Lecteur:"

Le spectacle ennuyeux de l'immortel péché:

.

La fête qu'assaisonne et parfume le sang;

.

Cirant à Dieu, dans la furibonde agonie:

"O mon semblable, O mon maître, je te maudis!"

The voyage stands for the great search, the adventure of life but it also stands for the unknown adventure of death. The paradox is that in death the poet has hope of reaching "le nouveau," of finding light in the darkness.

CHAPTER V

ECHOES OF LIGHT, REFLECTIONS OF SOUND:

TWO VISIONS OF SOCIAL HELLS

Dante and Baudelaire share their experiences of hell with others. To Dante the solidarity of man is based on the Christian belief in the human family with God as the father. This social perspective is indicated in the first line of the Inferno by the words, "il cammin di nostra vita." This path of life is one which we all share. It is the road on which we walk back to God our father. From the first line, then, Dante's journey takes on meaning on the moral and anagogical levels. We must all experience hell-like evils in order to travel the path of life and suffer death to reach the afterlife.

The journey in Baudelaire's "Le Voyage" too stands for the adventure of life and the transit of death. In both this poem, which ends Les Fleurs du Mal, and in "Au Lecteur" the poet evokes social solidarity, but it is a perverted unity: "Hypocrite lecteur, —mon semblable,—mon frère." Instead of Christian brotherhood we have a fraternity of hypocrisy. Here we share not the fatherly grace of God but our mutual evil and the influence of "le Diable."

Dante's hell is a negative picture of all that his paradise is and of all that an ideal society should be. This vision of the afterlife which is a reflection of this life, is one of symbolic

retribution and reward. The inhabitants of hell are punished according to their sin. Thus the opportunists in Canto III who did not choose between good and evil are given no place in hell or in the other two realms but are left to pursue an ever-shifting banner in a darkness infested with stinging insects.

Baudelaire's hell is also set against his ideal of "le nouveau" but it is an illusive ideal not based on any over-all plan of social order. Though Baudelaire shows that he recognizes the dichotomy of good and evil in man, and thus the possibility of the two choices and of the two courses of action, in "Au Lecteur" such free choice is hopeless. Here there is no chance for reform, for remission of sins or for salvation—hell is the only fate. This universe based on the human condition of "ennui" is a chaotic one that can only be ordered by individual efforts, those of the artist, the lover, the traveller.

To the artist living in a disordered universe the origin of his inspiration, of beauty, and of order, is not important. Thus in "Hymne à la Beauté" the poet does not care about the source of beauty:

Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l'enfer, qu'importe,
O Beauté! monstre énorme, effrayant ingénu,
Si ton oeil, ton souris, ton pied, m'ouvrent la porte
D'un Infini que j'aime et n'ai jamais connu?

.

De Satan ou de Dieu, qu'importe? Ange ou Sirène,
Qu'importe, si tu rends, —fée aux yeux de velours,
Rythme, parfum, lueur, ô mon unique reine! —
L'univers moins hideux et les instants moins lourds?

Art, and beauty are only significant as means of reaching the absolute, as means of transforming the hideousness of life into the heavenly, as means of escaping hell. The movement in this universe is only up or down, heaven or hell. But there is often no distinction between up or down, beauty or ugliness, "Beauté! monstre énorme, effrayant ingénu."

This blurring of boundaries is found in the erotic cycles of "Spleen et Idéal." In "De profundis clamavi" the light and dark imagery indicates this derangement:

Du fond du gouffre obscur où mon coeur est tombé.
C'est un univers morne à l'horizon plombé,
Où nagent dans la nuit l'horreur et le blasphème

.

La froide cruauté de ce soleil de glace
Et cette immense nuit semblable au vieux Chaos.

The synaesthesia of these images captures the emptiness and turmoil that the poet has found in sensuality. His whole natural environment takes on a Stygian heaviness and obscurity: the horizon is leaden, the night flows with black horror and the sunlight is icy. The lover, like the artist, finds only momentary relief from the infernal chaos, for his mistress soon becomes a vampire that preys upon him or a cold and sterile "cadavre étendu." In his relationships with others the poet fails to find comfort and solidarity, alleviation from personal "ennui" and social disharmony. Love and evil are indistinguishable.

In "Tableaux Parisiens" Baudelaire expands this vision of infernal disorder in society by again using light-dark imagery.

In "Les Sept Vieillards" there are accursed mists:

Un brouillard sale et jaune inondant tout l'espace,

.

Tout à coup, un vieillard dont les quenilles jaunes
Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux

.

Hostile à l'univers plutôt qu'indifférent

When six others follow this grotesque spectre the poet calls them the "cortège infernal" because they like the first "monstre hideux" are "du même enfer venu." After confronting these seven personifications of personal and social evil the poet finds himself:

Exaspéré comme un ivrogne qui voit double
Malade et morfondu, l'esprit fiévreux et trouble
Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité.

These seven spectres could be seen as the traditional seven deadly sins.¹ The violence of the poet's reaction to this iniquitous vision clearly indicates the hellish quality of the apparition. The fact that the "cortège infernal" seems to materialize out of the obscurity and fog of the city gives them both a natural and supernatural origin, like sin. In this vision there is a confusion between the worlds of the material and the spiritual. As Jacques Savan observes:

"...la terre et les enfers. Dans l'esprit de Baudelaire il n'y a

¹Brunelli, op. cit., pp. 115-138.

point de difference essentielle entre ces deux domaines."²

The confusion and "ennui" of the infernal urban experience, then, is often illustrated by the French poet with the employment of synaesthetic techniques. The hallucination of "Les Sept Vieillards" seems to dislocate his senses so that he becomes "un ivrogne qui voit double." In "Le Crépuscule du Soir" the darkness takes on tactile qualities:

Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel;
Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup; le ciel
Se ferme lentement comme une grande alcôve.

.

C'est l'heure où les douleurs des malades s'aigrissent!
La sombre Nuit les prend à la gorge....

This image of stifling darkness recalls the dense, suffocating blackness of the lower depths of the Inferno, as shall be shown later.

In contrast to Baudelaire's view of universal discord, Dante has a harmonious view of the cosmos which is reflected in the highly ordered structure of the Commedia: the hierarchical placement and separation of hell, purgatory and heaven with all the various levels in each realm. In addition to this vertical structure the Commedia also has a symbolic cyclical pattern. Mediaeval Neo-Platonism saw the whole universe as a continual emission from a first point of origin, God the Primum Mobile. The ultimate goal of all creation was to return to this point of origin. This cyclical

²"Le Sens de la chute dans l'oeuvre de Baudelaire,"
The French Review, XXIV (Dec. 1960), pp. 127-28.

pattern was to be realized in the human soul and in all human actions, temporal and spiritual. A great deal of Christian writing demonstrates this cyclical design but probably one of the earliest examples is the symbolic circular structure of Saint John's Gospel. The evangelist opens his book with an introduction that has a circularity symbolizing the messianic journey of Christ:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.³

The light imagery in this Gospel is poetically used to show that the light of men and the Word is Christ. Such light symbolism recurs often in this gospel: "I am the light of the World" and "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."⁴ Human existence and action have but one goal then, to follow the light of Christ back to God—to the reunion with the absolute—the origin and end of all creation.⁵

³John I: 1-21, in The Holy Bible, op. cit.

⁴John 9:5 and 12:46 respectively.

⁵John is also the author of The Revelations (The Apocalypse) whose eschatology can be related to the Neo-Platonic vision of the cosmos.

This pattern of reunion with God is one of the structural bases of the Commedia, both in the poem's cosmology and in the pilgrim's journey. Thus the poem begins with Dante in the dark wood and ends before the radiance of God.

In the previous chapter I suggested that the "selva oscura" was a type of the lost Garden of Eden. The second line of the Inferno hints at this interpretation: "Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura." The reflexive verb "ritrovarsi" means to find oneself but "ritrovare" alone means to find again. Thus Dante, speaking for us all, is saying that we find ourselves lost again in darkness and sin. We are lost as was Adam after his original sin. On one level the light in the poem is a symbol of Christ and thus the moral and anagogical levels of meaning become clear. Dante, as pilgrim, becomes a moral example to others of a repentant sinner who is forgiven, suffers penance for his guilt and is saved. The pilgrim's journey follows the light of Christ out of the darkness and into paradise and thus traces the scheme of man's redemption. The Inferno, then, begins in the darkness of sin, not only Dante's personal sin but also the sin that everyone inherits, original sin, the sin with which we all begin "il cammin di nostra vita." The Inferno ends not quite in the noonday brightness of grace but nevertheless within hopeful sight of "le stelle," the lights of heaven. Only after the Purgatorio is the poet "puro e disposto a salire alle stelle." And the Paradiso begins with words in praise of God as an all-pervasive supernatural luminary:

La gloria di colui che tutto move
 per l'universo penetra e risplende
 in una parte piú e meno atrove,
 Nel ciel che piú della sue luce prende.

The reference to the Primum Mobile and the light imagery is an echo from Canto I of the Inferno:

e'l sol montava 'n su con quelle stelle
 ch'eran con lui quando l'amor divino
 mosse di prima quelle cose belle.
 (38-40)

This light imagery is reverberated again near the end of the Paradiso in the vision of God seen by the pilgrim, "un punto... che raggiava lume." Beatrice explains to Dante, "Da quel punto dipende il cielo e tutta la natura."⁶ The whole universe radiates from and depends on the Creator. Light, then, represents the love and illumination of God which is symbolized by the sun. The cyclical recurrence of light imagery seems to echo Saint John's Gospel.

The love of God, though, is not only symbolized by the light it is also personified in the guides that assist the pilgrim. Beatrice herself is traditionally regarded as the symbol of divine love. It is significant that Dante, unlike Baudelaire, has three stern but understanding guides to help him in his journey through the afterlife: Virgil, Beatrice and Bernard. Not only is this Dante's use of the traditional guardian angel motif but it also indicates the poet's fundamental belief in the solidarity of man.

⁶Canto XXVIII, 16 and 41-42. The "raggi," the golden threads of light, that the pilgrim first saw in the dark wood have drawn him up before the luminous face of God.

In contrast to the lonely search and pessimism of Les Fleurs du Mal the Commedia has this basic optimism in its belief in the family of man and the fatherly providence of God.

In addition to being a narrative and an allegory the Commedia is also a poem of protest. Thus as Baudelaire repudiated the spiritual, philosophical and social complacency of his day so also Dante attacked the political and moral anarchy of his age. To Dante the harmony that God established in creation was an example for each man to follow in forming an ordered society. His contemporaries had neglected this ideal. As the images of light and motion of the Primum Mobile indicate, Dante has in mind the Pythagorean view of a harmonious universe.⁷ This system saw the order of the universe in the motion, light and sound of the celestial spheres. The ordered measures of music represented the symmetry and proportion of creation. The regular motion of the lights of heaven reflected the musical sound of these heavenly bodies. This harmonious relation of sight and sound is often conveyed by Dante through the use of synaesthetic imagery.

As in the case of Baudelaire, the synaesthesia of Dante represents not only a stylistic device but also the philosophical idea of order and unity. With it two or more senses can either be

⁷Romano Guardini, "Le Phénomène de la lumière dans la Divine Comédie," in Dante, Visionnaire de l'Eternité, trans. from German by Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962), p. 192.

harmoniously joined or discordantly juxtaposed. And since Dante regards the senses as the avenues of the mind his employment of this technique is related to his view of social and personal harmony and to his vision of chaos in hell. The sense of sight is valued by Dante as the most powerful of the means of perception as is proven by the visual orientation of the Commedia not only in the light imagery but also in the mass of visual details in many of the scenes.

The visual emphasis is manifest in the Inferno where Dante communicates hellish disorder by the recurrent use of obscured lighting combined with the suggestion of silence or of discordant sounds. In Canto I when Dante is frightened by the wild beasts he says that he shrinks back into the darkness of the wood, "mi ripigneva la dove 'l sol tace," where the sun is silent. The senses of sight and sound are associated and therefore intensified. After passing through the gates of hell upon which is written, "Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate" in "colore oscuro," Dante hears horrible sounds which he connects with the obscurity:

Quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai
 risonavan per l'aere senza stelle,
 per ch'io al cominciar ne lagrimai.
 Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
 parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
 voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle,
 facevano un tumulto il qual s'aggira
 sempre in quell'aura senza tempo tinta.
 (III, 22-29)

Chaos in this region is due not only to the mêlée of shrieks and gloom but also to the absence of any measured time, "sanza

tempo tinta." There is no coloring of regular night and day but only the blackness of timeless night. Dante's experience of the earthquake at the end of this scene is also described with synaesthetic images:

Finito questo la buia campagna,
tremò si forte, che dello spavento
la mente di sudore ancor mi bagna.
La terra lagrimosa diede vento,
che balenò una luce vermiglia.
(III, 130-34)

The tactile sensation of the pilgrim's perspiration due to his great fear, is juxtaposed with the tearful image of the "terra lacrimosa." The sounds of the wind and the quake are reflected in the flash of vermilion light. The red color, especially in blood, a multi-sensual image, is used often in the Inferno as we shall see. In this scene Dante has skilfully created the confusion of sight, sound and touch, a confusion that reflects the memory of such a traumatic experience. In this hell the disharmony is not only external but internal as well.

In the next canto hell is called the "ceco mondo," a world in darkness, in the literal and the moral senses and therefore blind to God's light. This image is repeated in Canto X, 58 and Canto XXVII, 25. But limbo is in sharp contrast to the murkiness of hell. Here we have the harmony of sound and light:

Traemmoci così dall'un de' canti,
in luogo aperto, luminoso e alto,
sì che veder si potean tutti quanti.
(115-117)

While these sinners share a river of hot blood the sinners of suicide form a forest of bleeding trees. In Canto XIII the damned have been transformed into trees which pour forth dark blood, "sangue bruno." But the blood here is also associated with the babbles of pain from their harpy inflicted wounds:

si della scheggia rotta usciva insieme
parole e sangue....

(43-44)

The senses continue to be synaesthetically confused as the pilgrim and his guide descend further into hell. Darkness becomes associated more and more with the sense of touch as is the case with Baudelaire. In Canto XXI the malebolge of barrators is described as "mirabilmente oscura." Here sinners are plunged into boiling pitch. The thick, black pitch suggests that the atmosphere too is "tenace pece." Since we cannot really see we are made to feel the dark viscosity of the place.

In the Inferno, then, Dante has employed the technique of synaesthesia to create a sense of overwhelming disarray but it must be noted that in the Purgatorio and Paradiso it is used to create an opposite end. In all cases though and especially in the examples from the Inferno we are reminded of the lines from Baudelaire's "Correspondances:"

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

With both Dante and Baudelaire synaesthesia is a paradox.

The two poets are able to successfully use this technique to communicate ugliness and disorder in a form which is poetically beautiful and harmonious. Other paradoxes of light and darkness in the work of Baudelaire may illustrate some of his spiritual affinities and disparities with Dante. The first paradox in Baudelaire's poem is the oxymoron of the title, Les Fleurs du Mal. This image can be looked at as an emblem of the poet's aesthetic theory of the derivation of beauty from any source, even ugliness.⁸ This notion is poetically expressed in "Hymne à la Beauté:"

Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l'enfer, qu'importe,
O Beauté! monstre énorme, effroyant, ingénu!

Beauty can be extracted from anywhere. This is also true for human beauty for Baudelaire writes regarding the beauty of a fascinating woman:

Elle représente bien la sauvagerie dans la civilisation.
Elle a sa beauté qui lui vient du Mal, toujours dénuée
de spiritualité, mais quelquefois teintée d'un fatigue
qui joue la mélancolie.⁹

Baudelaire's association of beauty with evil is, on one level, a perversion of all the traditional notions of beauty and goodness. On another level there has always been the suspicion, often unvoiced, that there is something unnatural about extraordinary beauty. Not all evil is ugly. Lucifer, the personification of evil, was the most

⁸See "Salon de 1846," "Salon de 1859" and "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," Oeuvres, op.cit.

⁹"Le Peintre de la vie moderne," *ibid.*, pp. 1187-8.

beautiful of all the created beings.¹⁰

But the title Les Fleurs du Mal can also have a moral interpretation. This can be seen by comparing it to a similar flower image found in Canto II of the Inferno. Virgil, in trying to encourage Dante, speaks to him of Beatrice and Lucia so that the pilgrim makes a surprising recovery:

Quali i fioretti, dal notturno gelo
chinati e chusi, poi che 'l sol li imbianca
si drizzan tutti aperti in loro stelo,
tal mi fec' io di mia virtute stanca.

(127-130)

In this passage Dante is using the sun and flower image on the literal level as a simile to describe the beneficial effects of the words of Virgil on his own flagging courage. But Virgil is also the representative of reason and thus on the allegorical level it is reason that is helping Dante. We have also seen that the sun is a symbol for the love of God and so on the moral level it is divine love that is revitalizing the poet from his spiritually sick condition. Traditionally Christ has been the light of the world and so on the anagogical level the image is a rhetorical reflection of Christ's salvation.

This flower and light image has additional functions and meaning. The "notturmo gelo," nocturnal cold, echoes the dark wood—the dark spiritual state—of the opening canto. The verb "drizzan," to straighten, recalls "la diritta via," the straight path, of line three. Virgil's guidance and the grace of God have begun to set the

¹⁰Baudelaire seems to be captivated by dark or savage beauty: "A une dame créole," "A une madone," and his Satan.

pilgrim on the straight path once more.

The proximity of the image "i fioretti, dal notturno gelo," and that of Les Fleurs du Mal is perceptible. Baudelaire's use of the paradoxical image as a title not only suggests to us notions similar to those that we find in the paradox of the Commedia but it also has a wider, anagogical vision of reality.¹¹

Nevertheless François Mauriac writes that for religious and moral reasons the title of Baudelaire's poem is a mistaken one.¹² We can disagree with Mauriac and argue that it is truly the most suitable one. Not only has the image of the title precedence in Dante but I hope to show that the paradox as Baudelaire uses it has suggestions of Christian doctrine.

The title implies that the beauty of the flower is derived from the ugliness of evil. This paradox finds a parallel in the Christian notion of goodness being taken out of evil. Since evil is the absence of goodness only God has the power to create from negation. The paradox is exemplified by Christ's birth, passion, death, descent into hell and resurrection for the salvation of man. Only with the grace of God can Adam's evil—the original sin which we all inherit—become the "luck fall," the occasion for Christ's incarnation and salvation of mankind.

¹¹The traditional "fioretti" image has suggestions of the archetypal cycle of birth, life, death and regeneration.

¹²"Charles Baudelaire the Catholic," in Baudelaire: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Henri Peyre (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 33.

The existence of evil and the possibility of sin is a recognition, if not an affirmation, of man's free will in being able to choose good over evil, "idéal" over "spleen." Human action can neither be deserving of punishment nor of reward if it is not free action.

There is another dimension to this image of the flower of goodness and beauty blooming in the darkness of evil. In "Le Guignon" Baudelaire develops this paradox:

— Maint joyau dort enseveli
 Dans les ténèbres et l'oubli,
 Bien loin des pioches et des sondes;

Mainte fleur épanche à regret
 Son parfum doux comme un secret
 Dans les solitudes profondes.

Is the poet suggesting that it is necessary to go down deep into the darkness of evil in order to dredge up the precious spark of goodness? Are we to believe that man as the artist can also create good from evil? As Dante journeys deep into hell and struggles up the mountain of purgatory to achieve self-knowledge so Baudelaire fathoms down into his subconscious. Both artists risk not only failure but an eternity of madness and suffering. But both seem to feel that the ultimate reward is worth the anguish of the search and the great peril. The flower of goodness, "Une fleur qui ressemble à mon rouge idéal," (L'Idéal), is to be derived from the evil of the suffering.

Mauriac argues that in Les Fleurs du Mal "Sin maintains all

its ugliness in it [itself]...."¹³ This view is only partially true for it misses a fundamental moral element in the poem. Not all evil is ugly. While at times the poet shows vice to be sordid, at others he also shows it to be attractive. Baudelaire, deals with the most physically enjoyable types of sin, the most tempting, those of the flesh. The very fact that the poet shows himself struggling to reach his "idéaI," contending against his baser animal nature, striving and failing, gives the poem a Christian dimension. The poet shows us that the moral conflict, "La lutte des deux principes... la chair avec l'esprit," is all the more difficult since evil is often very attractive and more easily attainable than the more difficult good.

Dante too presents sins of the flesh as attractive not only to others—Paolo and Francesca—but also to himself as the handsome "lonza" indicates. Even after having journeyed through hell and supposedly having learned his moral lessons Dante is easily seduced by a "dolce serena" in the Purgatorio (XIX, 7-35). It is necessary for Virgil to intervene with a sword to bring Dante back to the straight path again. Dante has guides to watch over him, guides who are personifications of reason, divine love and illumination.

Baudelaire, on the other hand, has no one to guide him on his search for the absolute. Unlike Dante's madone, his seductive Beatrices keep him anchored to his terrestrial proclivities like the awkward wings of the albatros. Spiritually and temporally Baudelaire seems to be alone with only his art:

¹³"Charles Baudelaire the Catholic," op. cit., p. 33.

La seule concession qu'on puisse raisonnablement faire aux partisans de la théorie qui considèrent la foi comme l'unique source d'inspiration religieuse, est que le poète, le comédien et l'artiste, au moment où ils exécutent l'ouvrage en question, croient à la réalité de ce qu'ils représentent, échauffés qu'ils sont par la nécessité. Ainsi l'art, est le seul domaine spirituel où l'homme puisse dire: "Je croirai si je veux, et si je ne veux pas je ne croirai pas."¹⁴

These poems are the precious flowers of faith that Baudelaire has dredged up out of his dark, lonely search for "l'azur."

The moral conflict in both the works of Dante and Baudelaire has still another subtle dimension which is related to their vision of social and personal evil. As both poets delve into the dark depths of the human spirit they find a frightening element: the enjoyment of evil for its own sake. The sociable and talkative yet unrepentant sinners of the Inferno are echoed in the pessimistic words of the speaker in "Au Lecteur." Both poems recall Saint Augustine who was one of the first to make this revelation of personal evil in his Confessions.¹⁵ While a knowledge of evil is necessary for moral development this knowledge involves a risk. The great sinner ironically always seems to have the potential of becoming the saint, and the saint the sinner. This is the paradox in both Dante and Baudelaire's spiritual aspirations. They must know sin, experience evil in depth, see hell before they can spring back to life and move

¹⁴"Salon de 1859," Oeuvres, p. 1045.

¹⁵I am referring to the pear stealing incident from Augustine's youth.

towards the absolute.¹⁶ In the Inferno Dante must see Satan face to face before he can make the literal and symbolic about face, "volse la testa... tornar... io levai li occhi...."¹⁷ and begin his long heaven-ward climb. With both poets their moral action involves the suffering of a hell.

While the experiences of infernal torment that both Dante and Baudelaire have captured in their poems have the affinities which we have seen, they also have some fundamental differences. When Dante is in hell he is troubled not only by his own fears and weaknesses but also shares in the pain of those that he meets there. Thus with spirits like Francesca, Farinata and Ser Brunetto the pilgrim feels true Christian compassion. With his belief in the solidarity of man Dante is never alone in sorrow or joy. Dante sees his hell as a very social one while Baudelaire sees his society as infernal.

Baudelaire suffers alone. While he can identify with some of his characters and their anguish, Don Juan and the travellers in "Le Voyage," he cannot effectively share his pain with others. This solitude is what makes his "ennui" so acute—a modern hell worse than that of Dante. Only in his art has Baudelaire been able to communicate his inner torment.

¹⁶Max Milner, Baudelaire: enfer ou ciel qu'importe!
(Paris: Plon, 1967), p. 100.

¹⁷Canto XXIV, 78-88. The parallel to this is Dante facing God in the Paradiso.

It has been said that Dante's art is an affirmation of his faith in God and that Baudelaire's is a testimony of his belief in the spiritual importance of art. Of both poets it can also be said that their imaginative creations, like those of the artists in "Les Phares"

Sont un écho redit par mille labyrinthes;
C'est pour les coeurs mortels un divin opium!

C'est un cri répété par mille sentinelles,
Un ordre renvoyé par mille porte-voix;
C'est un phare allumé sur mille citadelles,
Un appel de chasseurs perdus dans les grands bois!

Car c'est vraiment, Seigneur, le meilleur témoignage
Que nous puissions donner de notre dignité.

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APPENDIX

The following is a chronologically arranged list of some 43 critics and the works in which their references to comparisons between Dante and Baudelaire can be found.

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